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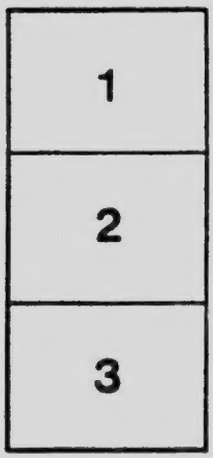

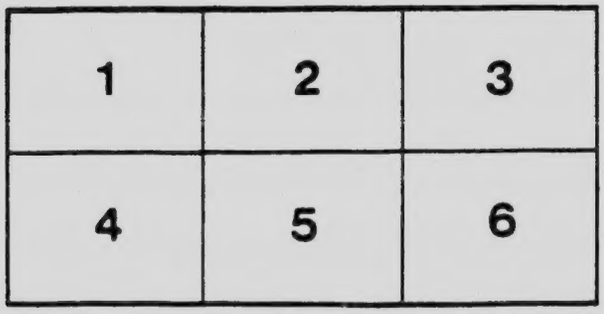

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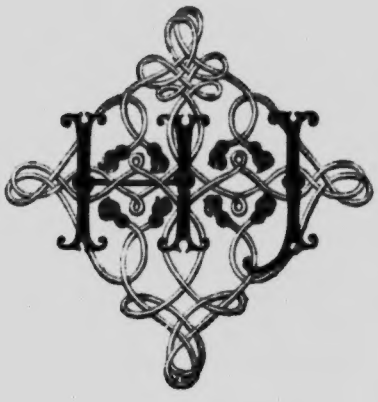

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TO
A WOMAN
OF
NO IMPORTANCE

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For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange;
Something is wrong: there needeth a change . . .
The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet
And again in his border see Israel set . . .
Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place:
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o'er
The oppressor triumph for ever more?"

BROWNING: HOLY CROSS DAY.

SHEILA INTERVENES

CHAPTER I

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

"It does not matter much what a man hates, provided he hates something."—THE NOTE BOOKS OF SAMUEL BUTLER.

"OH, the brute! he's simply slain my ankle!" Sheila Farling limped painfully up the steps to the boat deck and leant against the rail, nursing the injured limb. "Mr. Playfair, why don't you swear or offer to fetch arnica or kill the man or do something, instead of standing there and treating the whole thing as a joke?"

"You wouldn't let me carry you upstairs, so it can't be very bad," said Denys Playfair, "and I decline point-blank to kill a man when I've not even been introduced to him. It isn't done."

"Nobody loves me!" Resting a hand on his shoulder she hobbled across to a seat and sat down. "Tell Father Time to come and say good-bye when you see the end approaching. I'm afraid he'll miss me dreadfully, I'm the only thing he has to care for in the whole world. And I'm only nineteen! The pathos of it!"

Denys sat down beside her and began filling a pipe.

"I propose to smoke to you for a short space," he remarked. "If the pain hasn't gone in five minutes' time, I will——"

"What?"

"Go on smoking."

"I think the modern young man is the hardest, coldest, unkindest, unfeelingest brute in creation. And that settles that."

He lit the pipe, held the match for her to blow out, and leant back with an amused smile. The presence of Sheila Farling on board had almost reconciled him to the idea of leaving the south where he had been spending the winter on account of his health. After six weeks in Granada and Algeciras he had joined the boat, in company with his fellow-traveller, Dr. Gaisford, at Gibraltar, and they had lost little time in striking up an intimacy with Sheila Farling and her grandfather. The Farlings had come on board at Naples after a winter spent in Sicily and the south of Italy, and the intimacy had been fostered by the fact that all four sat at the captain's table in the saloon, and that Sir William Farling and Denys were already acquainted as colleagues on the board of the Anglo-Hibernian Life Assurance Corporation. The majority of the other passengers had come the whole way from Fremantle: every possible friendship had been tried and broken before they were through the Canal, every conceivable combination and intensity of intrigue attempted before the mails were put ashore at Naples; the last eight days of the voyage were being devoted to the exhaustion of retrospective scandal.

There had been no lack of hospitality in welcoming

the four newcomers to the feast of slaughtered reputations, but the invitation had been half-heartedly received. Old Sir William Farling, white-haired, erect, immaculate, courtly and cynical, had moved for fifty years in an atmosphere of *grandes scandales:* his interest was unawakened by the relation of the innocent and unsuccessful pursuit of the third officer or the compromising behaviour of the assistant purser. It was more amusing to him to exchange anecdotes with Dr. Gaisford, a fellow Irishman, and, though younger by a generation, a graduate like himself of Trinity College, Dublin. Sheila and Denys had gravitated naturally towards each other, drawn together by an approximate equality of age.

To him, as to every other man who met her, she was at once a revelation and an enigma. Slight and black-eyed, with hair that reached almost to her knees when she brushed it, and shone with the blue tinge of polished steel, she reminded him of nothing so much as a spoilt and petted Persian kitten. Her face was small in feature and constantly changing in expression, with eager lips slightly parted in a mischievous smile, and finely cut nose ever ready to raise itself in scorn or disapproval. Scorn was for those who issued orders or tried to make her walk their road instead of her own, foolish old women who reminded her of the convenances, or fatuous unchastened boys who tried to engage her attention; disapproval was for any who declined to slip into the place allotted them in her private order of creation or were devoid of every quality from which amusement could be extracted. Denys had been within sight of condemnation: he

laughed at her, teased her and refused to treat her seriously or as anything but a sweet, wilful child. Such treatment she had never before tolerated, and the exception in Denys' favour was only made in consideration of compensating advantages to be derived from bearing with his raillery and avoiding an open breach. She found he could talk as she had never heard anyone talk before, forgetful of himself and of her, like one inspired; so she met his teasing with a smile in her black, laughing eyes, arguing, quarrelling and making up their quarrels a dozen times a day.

Denys would listen delightedly to the milk-soft, West of Ireland voice with its rapid, torrential utterance and plashing cascade of laughter. In Sheila there was more untroubled, radiant happiness than in any other girl of his meeting. Nothing ruffled or depressed her spirits, everything was a source of enjoyment to her, everyone she met a fund of amusement. She seemed to drain life to the last sluggish drop of happiness and to look with unaffected wonder on all who failed to follow her example. Her company for the last five days had been deliciously exhilarating: the sunny smile and babbling tongue made him forget the health he had been nursing in Spain and the work which was recalling him to England: they had been living in a golden age of their own, and the boundless expanse of blue water around them rendered their kingdom inaccessible to the passions and injustices and cruelties of reality. He would be sorry when the voyage ended; yet he knew that so far as he was concerned, the sooner it ended the better. Sheila was coming to occupy too large a place in his thoughts,

and the plan on which his life was mapped out admitted of no interference by man or woman, friend or wife.

Of her real nature he knew little or nothing. A five days' friendship in the unembarrassed, confidential atmosphere of a great liner had told him her age, upbringing, and relations: they had found friends and enemies in common. She was surprisingly well read for her years, shrewd in judgment and tenacious of purpose. Living alone with her grandfather since the death of her parents, her mind had in some ways developed prematurely; in character the same influence had left her curiously unformed. Intolerant, self-willed, and impetuous, she found life unendurable when she could not get her own way, and in the course of shaping an ill-contrived world to her own standard she displayed a wholly masculine directness and self-confidence. Sir William idolised her and made no attempt to moderate her extravagances: she had achieved so many hair's-breadth escapes that he had full faith in her power of looking after herself, and as long as his indulgence left her so sweet-tempered, he luxuriated in her breathless, exacting tyranny. Denys regarded the future with misgiving and tried to probe beneath the surface.

The laughing, black eyes baffled him. She gave no indication of caring for anything or feeling interest in anything save in so far as it afforded a temporary distraction or amusement: and she was apparently without preferences even in her amusements. He could discover no guiding principle or dominating taste beyond a frank and engaging love of mischief: "I shall be able to get a lot of fun out of you," was the

phrase which expressed her highest approval of anyone she met ; it had been applied to him the second day they were on board together, and he had done his best not to disappoint her.

" I wish you'd say something," she began plaintively, after a silence which for her was long. " For your own sake. If the ship went down—you know they do sometimes—you wouldn't like to think that poor little Sheila had spent her last moments of life nursing a broken ankle with no one to love her or be kind to her."

" At the same time, if we *are* to be drowned, it would be very consoling to reflect that I'd retained my faculty of smoking right up to the last. However, we'll assume we aren't going to die just at present, and I'll start taking care of you. To begin with, you mustn't sit about in that thin dress without a coat. I'm going to fetch you the white, woolly thing that you think sets off your figure so well."

" Well, so it does."

" I know, but I'm not sure you ought to be so conscious of it. ' Cabin No. 118, B. deck, hanging up on the right as you go in ; and if you can't find it, for the love of heaven don't rummage.' Are those the orders ? "

" They are. I say, you're getting awfully useful."

" Well, when I meet a girl on board and she can't do up her dress, or tie up her shoe-laces or face the gentlest of gentle rolls in the Bay, and doesn't bring a maid to help her out of her difficulties, I feel we men have to show what stuff we're made of. And all the reward we get for our slaving is to be told that the

modern young man is the hardest, coldest, unkindest, unfeelingest brute in creation."

"I take it all back: there are moments when you are perfectly adorable."

Denys bowed his acknowledgments and ran along the boat deck to the companion way. Sheila watched him with a greater interest than she usually permitted herself when young men hastened to do her bidding. Denys amused her: he was so old in manner and young in mind, so clever in brain and simple in character, so reserved in behaviour and so quickly aroused when properly handled. She knew him to be an orphan and at one period to have been a Fellow of an Oxford college. It was the first time such a combination had come her way, and she was resolved to make the most of it. There might be something in him to interest and amuse her: at the worst, when his ingenuous, shy simplicity began to pall, she could look back with considerable pleasure to the days of their home-coming.

In a boat peopled with returning Colonials and bearded Scots who kicked her as they danced, it was no ordinary luck to discover a man who had apparently read every book that had ever been written, and could talk with the freshness and enthusiasm of a schoolboy who has forgotten to be self-conscious. He was young, too, which was a merit in her eyes—not more than five or six and twenty—and undeniably presentable. Her eyes followed him till he disappeared from sight down the companion-way. He was tall, perhaps six feet high, though an habitual stoop would have taken away several inches from his height, had it not been

somewhat accentuated by an undue leanness of body. The face was thin and worn, with sharply outlined cheek and jawbones, and a pair of large, deep-set eyes which afforded a dark contrast to the extreme pallor of his face. The hair was light brown in colour and brushed back from a broad, high forehead. He was in every way a creditable companion, and she resolved that the intimacy must be continued after their arrival in England. He had been absurdly reticent and mistrustful of her: she had been thwarted at every turn when she tried to get him to talk about himself.

Left to herself on the boat-deck, she rested her chin on her arm and knelt leaning against the rail to watch the play of the moonlight on the water. It was as though a mighty, unseen hand were pouring a silent stream of quicksilver over the black and glistening waves that lapped the gleaming sides of the smoothly gliding vessel. There should have been a gentle splash as the mercury met the water: it should have been possible to watch the silver drops sinking gradually from sight into that measureless waste of moving blackness: it should . . . And then she was called from her reverie by the sound of a light step behind her and the touch of a hand directing her arm into the warm recesses of a white, knitted coat.

"Any sisters, Mr. Playfair?" she asked as he buttoned the coat and handed her a mantilla.

"Not a relation in the whole wide world, I'm afraid."

"You're extraordinarily well broken."

"It's the reaction from living alone. When I come out of hiding I have to make up for a wasted life by

inconveniencing myself on the smallest provocation. Shall I do your packing for you?"

"It's done. Why didn't you offer earlier?"

"How was I to know? You've left sufficient things lying about the floor of your cabin to fill a fair-sized ark."

"Oh, of course if you're going to be rude I shall go and talk to Father Time."

"No; don't run away! Father Time, as you irreverently call him, is talking to the doctor and doesn't want you, while I——"

The antithesis was left incomplete as he found his pipe had gone out.

"While you want someone to talk to as you smoke? And I'm just not going to. Good-bye. Are you coming to call . . . ? Oh, mon Dieu, my ankle!"

She had risen for a moment but immediately sank back on to the seat. "How I hate everyone on this boat! When are we due in?"

"Midday to-morrow; that's St. Catherine's light-house we're passing now. Are you really in pain?"

"No, but I was half an hour ago and you never took any notice. All right, it's too late now. What was I saying? Oh, are you coming to call on us in town?"

"Not on top of the remark that you hate everybody on the boat."

"I wasn't asking you on my own account; I thought Father Time might like to see you."

"We shall meet twice a week in the board-room of the Anglo-Hibernian."

"Oh, very well, then, I'll say it. Will you come and see me? Cleveland Row, only you won't remember the number. It's in the telephone-book and there's a lift, so it won't be any trouble."

"I might."

"Might, indeed? You may be very clever, and you may have written such learned books that no ordinary, healthy-minded person can understand them, but that doesn't entitle you to be so offhand when I take the trouble to give you an invitation."

"But—my child——"

"That's not allowed."

"You are, in the eyes of the law and of the world. However, a small point. What I was going to say, when you interrupted me, was that I would come with much pleasure if I'm allowed to stay in London."

"But you're not—what's the word?—*wanted*, are you?"

"Not by the police, but there are certain physicians in the neighbourhood of Harley Street who accept large fees for the privilege of ordering me out of England, and saying what I mustn't eat and mustn't drink and mustn't smoke."

"You poor darling, have you been ill?"

"Oh, nothing much. Nothing to compare with your ankle, for instance."

He had turned the conversation from the subject of his own health, in part because a succession of illnesses and long years of invalidity had made him sensitive, in part because the mention of another's troubles revealed a new Sheila to him and made him self-conscious. The laughter had died in her eyes,

her forehead wrinkled in an expression of sympathy, and a flash of white showed that she was biting her lower lip.

"And you never told me!" she said in a tone of gentle reproach that touched and embarrassed him.

"Other people's ailments are so uninteresting," he protested.

"Not to me. Poor dears, I collect them. I've never been ill for a single day in all my little life . . ."

"Or unhappy?"

"Or unhappy either, and I simply can't bear to see people in trouble. That's my mission in life, to show people what a wonderful place this world is and teach them how to be happy."

"The Sphinx has spoken."

"Shall I show you?"

"Do I need it?"

"My dear, you always give me the impression of being haunted."

He gazed absently at her for a moment before replying

"Perhaps I am."

"But what have you done?" she asked in mock terror.

"Can't you be haunted by what you've not done? Can't you lie and dream of what you are fated to do and then wake to find yourself not strong enough to do it? Don't you know the old nightmare of feeling there is something you have to do—you can't tell what, it may be to get somewhere or find something or warn someone—and all the time knowing that you can't get it done? Your feet are dragged, something

with a smiling, sinister face is catching you up and at the end . . ."

"You wake up sobbing, and it isn't done!"

"Generally."

"Always."

His gaze travelled past her and rested on the moving lights of an outward-bound P. and O.

"Sometimes you dream the dream through to the finish."

"No."

"Believe me, I do. Some people say one dream merges in another so that you only end it by waking . . . And some say no one ever dreams his own death. Dying, yes, and usually trembling with fear, but not dead. I do. I dream my dream out, and then—quite logically—I dream myself dead!"

The P. and O. glided past them and he turned once more to face her. She looked curiously at the thoughtful eyes, proud nose, and nervous mouth, and then asked without apparent interest:

"And the dream itself?"

"Oh no," he answered with a laugh. "That belongs to another world where not even you are admitted."

"But I could find out, so why not tell me?"

"You are welcome to find out—if you can and if you think it worth while. At present I'm regarded as sane and harmless while I live in your unreal world. But the moment another soul entered my dream-world—the only real world I know—I should be mocked and reviled, probably incarcerated."

Sheila turned up the collar of her coat.

"The creature has its aspirations," she remarked impersonally, "but it's so self-conscious that it pretends the world would laugh at it and call it dreamer if it took the world into its confidence."

"That's as good an explanation as most. Look here, you're getting cold; we'd better move down."

Rising up, he offered her his hands. She took them and tried to stand, but the sudden pain in her ankle sent a wave of colour through her cheeks and she lowered herself once more on to the seat.

"Perfide Albion! it does hurt. No, there's nothing broken, but I must rest it a bit. You can go if you're tired of talking to me. If you're still strong you can stay and help me read the commination service over the Scotch. They eat haggis and call it food, they play the pipes and call it music, they wear a tartan and call it art or clothing or anything but damnable—Oh! I'm sorry, but they do, you know, so no wonder they can't dance."

Denys knocked the ashes out of his pipe and began slowly to refill it.

"Yet they have their good points, or had. No country has ever produced a race of men like the Jacobites. Their romantic heroism and splendid self-sacrifice! It's the classic instance, I suppose, of a cause being unworthy of the men who die for it. Or a sample of the irony of the gods . . . How often in history do you find an army and a leader or cause worthy of each other? Alexander the Great? Yes, and the gods struck him down at thirty-two. Julius Cæsar? Too dangerous—the gods grew timid—he had to be put out of the way. Mahomet? The cause

wasn't worth such fighters . . . Napoleon? Ah, he had the finest fighters in the world, but they were still no match for his own transcendent genius. Perhaps it's as well; what we call irony the gods may call providence . . . a wise adjustment of checks and balances. Had Alexander lived, had Napoleon been worthily supported, the face of the world would be too quickly changed . . ."

"Would that matter?"

"There would be no lost causes left to fight for."

Sheila lay back and listened hopefully, watching him with half-closed eyes. A little well-timed opposition, a chance question or patronising display of interest, was sufficient to loosen his tongue and unlock a heady, bubbling stream of words and an inexhaustible flow of ideas.

"Isn't the lost cause cult out of date?" she asked disparagingly.

"Other people's ideals always are," he answered apologetically. "And yet . . ."

The bait was taken, as she had made him take it whenever she found herself in need of amusement. He had been an invaluable relief to the tedium of the voyage. A hint or a challenge—and he would begin to talk, slowly, deferentially feeling his way, calm, judicial and restrained. Of a sudden the dark eyes would take fire and the thin face grow animated. An unexpected avenue of thought had opened to his view and he would race down it, dragging her in breathless pursuit. Whimsical and picturesque, winged with paradox and flashing with epigram, the ideas crowded and jostled each other till her brain grew

dizzy with sight of the fantastic dream-figures made startlingly real. The soft, eager voice rising and falling in musical cadence lost its deliberate Saxon intonation and took on the speed and mellow gentleness of the West. At times she would watch him pause, hesitate as the possibilities of a new theory unfolded themselves, and then, piece by piece, arrange the setting of the tableau. The richness and strength of his mind communicated themselves to hers: as they talked, her own brain grew suddenly clearer, bolder and more penetrating, she moved in a finer air and felt her intellect yielding him of its best. The awakening came with the cruel abruptness of a broken dream; her mind went flat like the slack string of a violin, and the reaction made her half afraid of venturing again into the charmed circle. But the fear was quickly overcome by the physical fascination of surrender: she enjoyed the sensation of growing powerless, abandoning herself to the hypnotic persuasion of that silvery voice, and following him in desperate pursuit of a shimmering, elusive will-o'-the-wisp.

"You've left out England," she reminded him when at last the voice died away and he allowed her to return to drab reality. Taking up her challenge he had defended lost causes as the only things for which a man should lay down his life. The Moors in Spain and Temporal Power in Italy had sheltered themselves behind his broad shield: he had been a Tolstoian in Russia, a Jacobite in Scotland, and a Bonapartist in France.

"Combine the last two," he told her. "Take

a man whose grandfather was out in the '15, his father in the '45. Confiscate his lands and houses, put a price on his head, brand him as an alien rebel. Then let him take stock of the people who so brand him: he is an alien and a rebel because he cannot blind himself to the dull stupidity of his rulers. They are unfit to rule—and he knows his own powers. Think of young Napoleon Bonaparte in Corsica, watching the House of Bourbon drive France into revolution: a dispossessed rebel, poor and proud, nothing to lose, everything to gain. The governing classes of England with their colossal stupidity and conceit, their genius for misgovernment, their stupendous, brutal want of sympathy and imagination . . . Isn't there romance in the thought of disturbing their fat placidity, meting out to them the same uncomprehending stubbornness and rigor that they meted out to America and Ireland? . . . What a vision of red, dripping vengeance! If you could enter upon politics . . . "

"Wouldn't I storm the Bastille?"

"Oh, dear me, no! You can loathe the crass, pompous, governing classes without wanting to supersede them with the equally crass and far more bigoted democracy. Punishment for punishment's sake is all I ask; I'm not interested in the reconstruction of society."

"But . . . poor old England! What has she done to deserve such a fate?"

"She's blundered into one of the most colossal empires in history. She governs it without sympathy, insight, heart or understanding. That is not the way to govern men and women of tender flesh and sensi-

tive nerves . . . She cannot comprehend an alien ideal or an unfamiliar point of view. And providence always punishes people who slight the ideals of others. Poor providence! Sometimes I think she has punished the English in advance by giving them the whole world and taking away their own souls, but it's poor satisfaction sending a man to hell if he's too gross and insensible to appreciate he's been sent there."

Sheila wrinkled her forehead in thought.

"Not good, that last," she remarked critically.

"What's not good?"

"The tirade against England. It's unconvincing. Stupid, yes, they are stupid and they do tread on people's toes, but not very hard. They rub along comfortably enough; everybody complains a little but nobody very much."

"I postulated a man with a fairly substantial grievance. Most people are too lazy and too wanting in pride to nurse a just resentment; they allow themselves to be misgoverned by an incompetent aristocracy and an inherently vulgar middle class because it's too much trouble to rise up and assert themselves. But if you could find a man too proud and vengeful to submit, if he and his fathers had been in revolt for generations, if their lands and houses had dwindled and disappeared as with the finer of the Jacobites, if at last one was left friendless, homeless, poor, to earn a livelihood as best he might . . ."

"It's an awful lot of 'ifs,'" interposed Sheila.

"I suppose it is." The interruption was timely: he had been growing excited and rhetorical; her critical, deliberate tone quieted him. "Still, it would

brighten up politics, wouldn't it? And they're deplorably dull at present."

"Why don't you . . . Hullo, keep quite quiet, here come Father Time and the doctor. Do we want to be interrupted?"

"I think not: it's our last evening together."

"Pretty speech!" she answered in a mocking whisper. "All right, they're behind the back funnel; they can't hear. All the same, I expect we shall have them round as soon as they get to the end, and I'm too lame to run away and hide."

Sir William and Dr. Gaisford had reached the boat deck by a ladder on the starboard side. After listening for a moment to the voices behind the engine-room ventilator they had walked slowly forward and were standing at the extreme end of the deck, leaning against the rail and watching the second class passengers walking swiftly arm-in-arm in belated penance for having taken no exercise earlier in the day.

"Did you see who it was my granddaughter was talking to? An Irishman, by the voice." Sir William resembled Sheila in nothing but a mischievous disposition and a refusal to grow old. At seventy-three he was as slim and upright as many men half his age: the white hair was belied by a vivacious tongue and twinkling eye; and an unerring memory of men met and books read during fifty teeming years was the sole reminder of the generation to which he belonged. In politics, diplomacy, literature, and finance he passed for a brilliant amateur, and admiring friends whispered to each other what heights he might have attained, had he thrown a modicum of enthusiasm into any-

thing he undertook. He was himself content with a humbler aim: it was the men who interested him in politics, not their measures or principles. He was happy to add patiently to a growing knowledge of human nature, to collect scandal and indulge a passion for intrigue, and to watch the eternal spectacle of savage man reconciling himself to a complex civilisation. His abilities were higher than his powers of application: he described himself as "capax imperii quia nunquam imperaverat."

"It was the same man that she's been talking to ever since I brought him on board," said Dr. Gaisford with a smile.

"Denys? Oh no! it wasn't his voice."

"But I distinctly saw him."

"Extraordinary. Perfectly extraordinary." Sir William stood facing out to sea, eyes closed and hands locked behind his back. "It'll come back to me in a minute. The voice, I mean. Someone I knew at Trinity. I can't have known him very well, because the face is quite lost. And I can't get the name. But that brogue and the—the wonderful timbre and melody of the voice, I've heard 'em somewhere. You're sure it was Denys?"

"Perfectly," said the doctor, with stout conviction. "I know that voice. Whenever he gets excited he talks like that; all the English reserve is only skin-deep. You must have heard him before."

"I only see him at board meetings, and there he's a model of solid, unemotional English decorum. Poor boy, I'm sure he hates it, he's too young and far too clever to waste his time in an insurance office. D'you

read his books? Well, they're out of the ordinary and rather wonderful for a man of his age. He ought to have kept on in the same vein. I never knew why he gave up his Fellowship."

"Money, I suppose. And Oxford offered no future."

Sir William buttoned his overcoat.

"Shall we move on? It's cold standing about. I must see if I can't find him a berth that 'll give better scope for his abilities. He ought to be in the House. He is breaking his heart where he is, and if we don't get him, the other side will. We want fresh blood and new ideas. I despair of our present defenders. The Labour outlook makes me very uncomfortable: we don't seem able to do anything to attract Labour. We want another Randolph."

"And where you'll get him I don't know."

"Nor do I, but we mustn't refuse the common lamp because we can't get a star to light us on our way. Denys is a man of ideas and personality; he mustn't be wasted."

Continuing in their walk they came up to the seat where Sheila and Denys were sitting. Sir William found himself a place between them while the doctor lowered his burly frame on to the deck and sat clasping his knees and sucking contentedly at an old briar. A grizzled, portly bachelor of five-and-forty with an extensive general practice among hypochondriacs who paid him large fees, Gaisford had a passion for youthful society and seldom allowed a week to slip by without a dinner party at which the maximum age was twenty-eight or thirty. A box at Covent Garden during the season gave him an excuse for a succession of small

gatherings for supper, and about every other year his name figured in *The Times* as one of the ball-giving hosts at the Empire Hotel. Sheila had already been invited to arrange the details of a Christmas Eve party seven months ahead. As she had found time before they had been on board together a couple of hours to criticise his clothes, recommend the use of a safety razor and disapprove of the tobacco he smoked, he felt it would be easier to retire from the fray and leave the responsibility for the success of his party on her capable little shoulders.

"Broken," she remarked wearily, extending the injured ankle in his direction.

"I'm off duty," said Gaisford after a cursory glance. "And it isn't even swollen."

"Been fighting?" asked Sir William.

"For a wonder, no," said Denys. "And it's the more remarkable because we've been talking politics."

Sir William felt in his pocket for a cigarette case.

"Where's the wild Irishman?" he asked.

"What wild Irishman?" said Sheila.

"The man who was talking when the doctor and I came up here."

"Oh, it was only that," said Sheila, pointing a scornful finger at Denys. "He always gets like that when he's excited. I believe he does it on purpose, because he knows it makes me homesick for Ireland."

"It made me feel extraordinarily old," began her grandfather.

"Well, what about me? You only had thirty seconds of it."

"I wasn't meaning that, but it recalled a voice I used to know when I was quite a [illegible] in Dublin. It must have been someone I met at one of the debating societies: I don't remember his name or his personal appearance or anything about him except the voice. And I haven't heard that for more than fifty years. It's very odd, gave me quite a turn. The doctor and I were talking Trinity shop, I'd completely forgotten this fellow's existence, then we came up here and we heard a voice that might have come from another world."

"Now then, Denys," said the doctor, "you're found in suspicious circumstances in possession of someone else's voice. How did you come by it?"

"Think carefully over your previous reincarnations before you perjure yourself," said Sheila warningly.

"Didn't even know I had it," said Denys. "I thought I was talking normally."

"My dear, you never talk normally," said Sheila. "You don't know how to. However, that's a side issue. It must have been a relation. Ancestors forward! Were any of you ever at Trinity?"

"My father was."

Gaisford shook his head. "Too young. I was up with him. What about a grandfather?"

Denys hesitated until the doctor thought his question had not been heard.

"Grandfathers forward," said Sheila impatiently.

"My grandfather was there, too," said Denys quietly, "but he must have been after you, Sir William. Two or three years, I imagine."

"We may have overlapped and I may have met

him without remembering anything about him. I certainly don't remember a Playfair; but then you don't remember the names of people who weren't your own exact contemporaries unless for some reason they were intimate friends of yours. Well, it isn't worth bothering our heads about. What happened to the grandfather—did he do anything much?"

"No. He just married and lived at home in the King's County . . . till his death."

"What part of the King's County?" asked Gaisford casually.

"Dunross Castle." The answer was given almost inaudibly and Sheila turned in surprise to find him sitting with downcast eyes, fidgeting nervously with the mouthpiece of his pipe. An uncomfortable silence followed, which was broken by Sir William ostentatiously looking at his watch and commenting on the speed of the boat. Denys looked at his own watch and announced that he must go and pack.

"What's the matter with the child?" asked Sheila when he was out of earshot.

Sir William spread out his hands in a gesture of protest. "Gaisford, Gaisford, why didn't you stop me? I wouldn't have had such a thing happen for a thousand pounds."

"But what's happened?" asked the doctor in perplexity.

"Playfair of Dunross? The Warrington case? You must have heard of the Warrington case."

"That was Playfair?"

Sir William nodded grimly. "That boy's as sensitive as a girl. He'll never forgive me."

Sheila wriggled herself impatiently forward; she had dropped out of the conversational firing-line for a full two minutes.

"Explain, please, Father Time."

"Explain what, my dear?"

"Oh, Dunross Castle, Playfair of Dunross, the Warrington case."

Sir William hesitated evasively.

"Dunross Castle was where the Playfairs used to live," he began slowly.

"Oh yes! and the Playfairs of Dunross were the people who used to live at Dunross Castle. An archdeacon is a person who performs archidiaconal functions, and an archidiaconal function is what an archdeacon performs. Give me credit for a little intelligence—I mean, just enough to appreciate when you're trying to keep something from me."

"Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find," said her grandfather humbly. "What do you want me to tell you?"

"Well, the Warrington case."

"Quite seriously, I shouldn't press the point," said Gaisford. "There are many things in this world which it's more comfortable not to know."

"Oh, you dears!" Sheila smiled sunnily at them. "Do you think I'm likely to get any less curious when you both become so pontifical and involved. Be brave and have it out. I'm lame and I don't want to have to ask that boy what the Warrington case was."

"For heaven's sake, don't do that!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Well?"

Sir William grasped the nettle.

"You'll find it all at home, Sheila. Look out 'Warrington' in the 'Celebrated Irish Trials' series. He was an agitator who agitated himself and a large number of inoffensive peasants into the dock and then turned informer. He got off, but one or two of his victims had to pay the penalty. Playfair of Dunross took it upon himself to mete out justice, there was a duel, the last political duel in English history, and Warrington was shot. Playfair gave himself up to justice and—well, they hanged him. I was at the Embassy in Vienna at the time, so the news only reached me in a scrappy state, but I remember feeling ran extraordinarily high. Playfair was the popular martyr and no words were bad enough for the government which had done him to death. They used to sing popular ballads in his honour—that was in the early sixties—then came the Phoenix Park murders in '82 and the whole episode was thrown into shadow. And this boy's his grandson! I didn't even know the first man had married."

"I knew the son," said Gaisford. "Of course I never knew he *was* the son, because Dunross was the only link and he wasn't living there when I knew him."

"What happened to him?"

Gaisford tapped his forehead. "A bit of a kink. He was one of the men who fought for the Boers in South Africa. Killed in the first six months of the war."

"And what happened to Dunross?"

Sheila had been listening, silent and fascinated. She

could not help recalling Denys' imaginary Jacobite family: one generation out in the '15, another in the '45, rebels and aliens.

"All the Irish property was sold by this boy's father, the man I used to know."

Sheila nodded: "Lands and houses fading and disappearing, as with the finer of the Jacobites."

"They were rather an old family," said Sir William, "and this is the last survivor. Well, it's a grisly business and happily it hasn't occurred to anyone else to connect the two names. Sheila, you'll have to make my peace with that boy. I don't want to lose his friendship; he's too valuable."

"What are you going to do with him?" she asked, getting up and preparing to descend to her cabin.

"I want to persuade him to take an interest in politics. He is far better suited for them than for his present work."

"Poor and proud, earning a livelihood as best he may, everything to win, nothing to lose, watching the obese, placid, governing classes who branded him and his as alien rebels." Sheila remembered the words and the passion with which they had been uttered.

"Apart from everything else—the things you don't understand, I mean," she said, "you must leave him to me. It won't do to make a politician of him."

"Why not?" asked her grandfather as he and the doctor prepared to follow her.

"He's much too good looking, for one thing."

CHAPTER II

A HUNGER-STRIKE IN BERKELEY SQUARE

"Opposite to exercise is idleness (the badge of gentry) or want of exercise, the nurse of naughtiness, stepmother of discipline, the chief author of all mischief, one of the seven deadly sins, . . . the devil's cushion, as Gualter calls it, his pillow and chief reposal."

BURTON: "ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY."

"LET'S turn back and have tea at home," said Sheila as her grandfather's car swept into Berkeley Square.

"My dear, it was your own suggestion that we should call, and I've promised to leave cards for Denys."

"I know, but Aunt Margaret always disapproves of me so openly. For a busy woman it's quite wonderful how much time she devotes to my shortcomings."

"She's never forgiven me for not entrusting you to her tender mercies."

"I'd never have forgiven you if you had. When I see the mess she's made of poor old Daphne . . . Hang it all . . . !"

"Sheila!"

"Well, what's wrong? Hang it all, hang it all, hang it all! There now, you've made me forget what I was going to say. Oh, I know. Hang it all—I've said it again—I do manage to get some fun out of life, which is more than Daphne ever does."

"Then you've not got Maurice Weybrook to look forward to as a husband!"

"That's true!"

Sheila closed her lips obstinately and lay back while the car slowed down and the footman enquired if her aunt were at home. Three weeks had passed since their return to England, and they were calling to pay their respects after a ball given by the Countess of Parkstone on behalf of her daughter Daphne the previous week. That, at least, was the ostensible reason, but Sheila was never at pains to expose the whole of her hand. She had met Denys at her aunt's ball and they had talked pleasantly together without reference to her grandfather's unhappy mention of Dunross Castle. Sheila had fished assiduously. She was trying to discover how far he had been speaking his own thoughts, how far suggesting a possible dramatic point of view, in his picture of an impoverished outcast awaiting the opportunity of revenging himself on a society that had already cost him his inheritance and the lives of his two predecessors. The lounge of the Ritz was an unsympathetic milieu, her fishing had gone unrewarded. Denys had been tired, matter-of-fact, and unimaginative: she had quite failed to induce the expression of dreamy unconsciousness in his eyes, to unlock the stream of magic language or awaken the music of his changing, mellifluous voice. Already the work he had been doing since his return was telling on him, and she had reminded her grandfather of his proposal to find some more congenial and less exacting form of labour for her friend. Another motive of their present call was the desire to find if Lord Parkstone in his semi-public capacity knew of a suitable opening.

Foiled at first-hand, Sheila had turned to secondary authorities. The Warrington case in the "Celebrated Irish Trials" made sorry reading: written without enthusiasm and from a strongly English standpoint, it made a fantastic, hot-headed, hare-brained figure of Playfair, without any appeal to generosity, romance, or sympathy. She read one page in three and was glad when the book ended. A doctrinaire Englishman trying to ride the whirlwind of agrarian discontent; a spluttering "Fair Rent" outburst; an eviction; the death of the evicting landlord, Plunket, sniped from an upper window of the house where Warrington and his victims lay barred, bidding defiance to the evictors; the trial of Warrington and his followers for murder. There was a single dramatic moment in the next chapter when Warrington turned Queen's Evidence and saved his skin at the expense of his fellows. Then pages on pages of the summing-up, given verbatim, then the sentences, then the executions.

Sheila tur[illegible] on impatiently to the time after the trial when [illegible]arrington went about Dublin under police escort, and was hissed and stoned in the streets by the mob. One night he slipped his guard and appeared in the Merrion Square Club, where he met Playfair and was told that the committee was sitting upstairs to decide whether he should be expelled from the club or requested to resign, and that in the meantime he had thirty seconds to get away before he was flogged out with a horse-whip. Warrington produced a revolver, Playfair twisted it out of his hand, cut him across the face with a paper-knife and offered him the alternative of fighting or being thrown to his friends

in the street. That night they drove out of Dublin with two young barristers to second them. Warrington missed, and hurled the revolver at his opponent: Playfair contemptuously let it hurtle past him and then shot his man through the head. By daybreak the seconds had driven off to Kingston and Playfair had given himself up to justice. Then once more the trial, the wearisome speeches and summing-up, the petition and demonstrations, the end. With a little imagination, the story might have made dramatic reading: in its present form it offered very slight excuse for fighting and dying in the ranks of the Queen's enemies, or talking—save for effect—of the "vision of red, dripping vengeance."

"Her ladyship is at home."

The sound of the footman's voice recalled Sheila from the forgotten passions of Irish history, and reminded her that she was in search of a sinecure for an agreeable but delicate young man who might be useful in other ways, and was in any case worth cultivating for the delight of his society and appearance.

"Aunt Margaret always *is* at home," she grumbled into her grandfather's ear as he helped her to descend. "It ought to be checked. Look here, you're not to go off and talk politics with Uncle Herbert and leave me with the dragon. She'll eat me one of these days, I know she will."

"Not now; she's had her lesson. The Countess of Parkstone swallowed plain Miss Margaret Farling in one gulp and her digestive organs have never recovered."

Sir William's visits to his daughter were conducted

in an atmosphere of mutual disapproval. Lady Parkstone had strong views on most subjects and particularly on the subject of her own infallibility. She believed in bringing up her only daughter on the lines of what she fancied to have been her own education, and this involved a rigorous censorship of the books Lady Daphne read, the plays she saw, and the men and women she met. In Berkeley Square and at Parkstone Manor there was usually to be found a small and eminently respectable collection of people whom the graceless Daphne described as bores. In the autumn they shot and talked of their shooting, in the winter they hunted and talked of their hunting, in the spring they moved en bloc to London and talked vaguely of the Season. Their faith was of the Established Church, their politics of a certain crusted Toryism in which the proprietorship of large landed estates was the first article of belief. They seldom surrendered themselves to political discussion, because they were all agreed beforehand, and conversation languishes when all the speakers are on one side; it is true that they devoted a portion of each day to the anathematisation of their opponents, but as these opponents were seldom if ever admitted to speak in their own defence, invective flagged for want of stimulus.

Daphne sometimes wondered why it was necessary to fill the house with so many people of exactly the same complexion of mind when one would have been sufficient to typify that particular form of life and that particular school of thought. She found it prudent, however, not to express her wonder in words, and

contented herself with a vague longing to meet people with other ideas, people who worked more and killed less, people who wrote the numerous books she was forbidden to read, the reckless incendiaries who voted the wrong way at General Elections, people of any kind who differed in any particular from those she met under her mother's roof.

Sir William from time to time charged his daughter with bringing Lady Daphne up in a world of narrowness and unreality for which the England of Jane Austen's day alone furnished a parallel. He even took the drastic step of inviting Daphne to spend the winter with him when her parents were abroad and introducing her to the unrivalled collection of journalists, barristers, Labour leaders, Russian nihilists, university fellows, social workers, authors, actors, dreamers and poets which he had amassed in the course of a long and enquiring lifetime.

It had been a period of unbroken bliss for Daphne, but the experiment was not repeated, and Lady Parkstone never tired of laying at her father's door Lady Daphne's waywardness and dissatisfaction with the Berkeley Square existence. She went further and carried the war into the enemy's camp by publicly disapproving of Sir William's treatment of his granddaughter Sheila. It was intimated that as Sheila had no parents of her own, her aunt should be the sole fount of authority and counsel. Sir William ventured the paradox that parents should only be seen on the strongest provocation, and never heard. As the meaning of the apothegm was not altogether clear to his daughter, he added that he would watch her success

with Daphne before entrusting Sheila to her care. The risk of a lasting breach between Lady Parkstone and her father was only averted by the fact that he and Lord Parkstone entertained a genuine liking and admiration for each other, while Daphne idolised the man who alone of her relations sympathised with her desire to take wing and see other aspects of the world than those which were visible from the prim and restricted windows of her mother's boudoir.

The drawing-room was thrown into semi-darkness by long, green blinds outside the windows, and it took Sheila and Sir William a moment or two to grow accustomed to the dim light after the glare of the street, and to distinguish the form of Lady Parkstone lying at full length on a sofa, reading a book. She was a woman of five-and-forty, short in stature and square in figure, with hard, unflinching eyes, a determined, straight mouth with aggressively gold-stopped teeth, black, unwaved hair, weather-beaten skin, an assertive manner, and precise, dictatorial speech. Sir William, who postulated softness and grace as the first requisites of womanhood, often wondered how any daughter of his could be so lacking in personal charm; he would have denounced her as a changeling had not the gentleness and beauty of Lady Daphne reminded him that inherited characteristics are sometimes recessive in quality and liable to disappear for a generation.

"Well, Margaret," he began with polished affability, "I hope you've got over the fatigue of your ball last week. You see I preserve the manners of the eighteen-sixties and come to pay my respects in person instead of sending my valet round with well-primed card-

case. It was one of the big successes of the early season."

"I think it went off all right, though I pray heaven to preserve me from having to give another for twelve months. I suppose people enjoy elbowing each other into a pulp, or they wouldn't come."

"Speaking for myself, I enjoyed coming and avoided being elbowed into a pulp. Perhaps that was because I left the ball-room to my juniors. Was Daphne none the worse for it?"

"Rather tired—we were all tired—but otherwise no worse than she has been for the last six months. By the way, Sheila, Daphne's in her room. I expect you'd like to see her, wouldn't you?"

Even this unceremonious banishment was preferable in Sheila's eyes to prolonged silence under her aunt's disapproving eyes, and without losing a moment she rose and left the room. As the door closed behind her Lady Parkstone turned again to Sir William.

"Father, I wish you could tell me what's the matter with Daphne and what I ought to do with her."

"Well, what *is* the matter? I mean, what are the symptoms?"

"I don't know." Lady Parkstone spoke impatiently. "She mopes and takes no interest in anything and behaves generally as if life were too heavy a burden for her to bear."

"If she wasn't engaged to Weybrook, one would say she was in love."

"I suppose that is intended for cynicism."

"No, I was merely eliminating an incredible hypothesis."

The engagement of Lady Daphne to Maurice Weybrook was the latest and largest bone of contention between Sir William and his daughter. Weybrook was an idle and unornamental young man on the verge of throwing up a commission in the Guards on the grounds of overwork. He lacked any particular redeeming vice, and showed no aptitude for any intellectual pursuit more profound than a thorough acquisition of the most up-to-date slang in London In age he was five-and-twenty, in appearance stoutly built, of medium size, with black hair copiously oiled and brushed back from the forehead without a parting, and a red face intensified in colour and made interesting by occasional pimples. In addition to these natural advantages he possessed a raucous voice, a loud laugh, and an unrivalled faculty for getting on Sir William's nerves in the shortest possible time.

Lady Parkstone kept her gaze concentrated on other points of his position, notably on the circumstance that he was heir to the marquisate enjoyed by his uncle; and the glamour of the coronet had once led her father to hope she would not live to an unduly old age. "She married an earl herself," he had said; "she's sacrificing Daphne to a marquis; she'll find a duke for Daphne's daughter, and in the next generation she'll head a revolution because she can't get the Blood Royal to marry into the family." Being a mere baronet himself he felt that his every appearance in Berkeley Square must emphasise in painful fashion the countess's plebeian origin. What Lady Daphne's own feelings were towards Maurice Weybrook no one knew. The previous winter they had been skating

together at Parkstone Manor ; the ice had given way and Lady Daphne had gone in and disappeared from sight. Weybrook, with the courage that his worst enemy would not have denied him, had rescued her, and before the end of his visit the two were engaged, though the announcement—at Sir William's almost passionate request—was not to be made public till Lady Daphne came of age. In the meantime he and others busily asserted that the engagement was the outcome of mixed feelings on Daphne's part and that the girl had repented her sudden choice : in any case he held that she should see a little more of the world and the men it contained before taking any irrevocable step.

Sir William returned to the discussion.

" How is she in health ? As we've ruled out love, we must try liver."

" I've taken her to Farquaharson. Of course I haven't any faith in his judgment, but he's supposed to be the best man. Farquaharson doesn't know what's wrong. I believe you could answer the question if you wanted to."

" I ? My dear Margaret, I'm no expert in juvenile ailments."

" Well, Daphne was absolutely all right till she went to stay with you last winter. What happened then I don't profess to know, but she's been perfectly wretched ever since ; no appetite, no enjoyment of anything, and always trying to put obstacles in the way of everything I tell her to do. If you aren't responsible for the change, at any rate it took place in your house."

" Well, if you really want my opinion and if you

think my character wants clearing, I should say Daphne is suffering from growing pains. It's a common disorder at her age and equally troublesome for the patient and the patient's mother."

"Now what on earth am I to understand by that?"

"Well, call them 'out-growing' pains and the meaning's clearer. All young men have a phase of jibbing at authority and demanding a latch-key of their own. And a good many girls are the same. They outgrow mother's apron-strings and want to run alone. Even you went through that phase, Margaret, though you probably thought you were only making a stand for elementary human rights which were denied you by your very inhuman parents."

"I'm quite sure that as far as I'm concerned, Daphne has never had her liberty curtailed. I can say that quite conscientiously."

"My dear, all parents cherish that delusion. I thought the same about you, and Daphne will think the same about her children."

"Well, what's the remedy?"

"Give her the latch-key."

"What will she do with it?"

"She'll hardly use it after the first week. We all of us come home to bed quite cheerfully as long as we know we're at liberty to stay out all night."

"Oh yes, but this is all the language of metaphor. In plain, unvarnished words, how am I to alter my treatment of Daphne, and what will Daphne do?"

"Don't ask her what she's going to do and don't raise any objections or reason with her if she tells you. As I said—in the language of metaphors—she won't do

much. Probably she'll break off her engagement with Weybrook, but I can only regard that in the light of an unmixed blessing."

Lady Parkstone shifted impatiently on the sofa.

"My dear father, you've really got Maurice Weybrook on the brain. I'm not going to argue his merits with you now, but I must point out that before they were engaged you raised no objection, and in fairness to us all I think you should say in what way Maurice has changed so much for the worse in the last six months."

"I don't think Maurice has changed."

"Then, good gracious! how is it you never have a good word for him now?"

"Because Daphne has changed. I told you she was suffering from growing pains, and one of the things she's outgrown is Maurice."

"In plain language——" She sighed with weary resignation.

"Six months ago I regarded Maurice as I regard him now, a very ordinary, thick-headed, ignorant, narrow-minded member of an ignorant and narrow-minded and rather useless class. For simplicity's sake, I call it the class of earth-cumberers. Six months ago—forgive me for saying that I did not know how much Daphne had in her. Very pretty, of course, and sweet and tractable, but it came as a surprise to me to find suddenly that she'd got a soul. I was wrong. I admit it unreservedly. When Daphne came to stay with me and I threw her into contact with people of a different mental calibre from what she'd been accustomed to, I saw my mistake. It was a revelation

to me. Have you ever seen a child from an East-end slum taken for the first time into the country or to the seaside? I thought of that when I saw Daphne. And if you ask me why she's moping now, I should say it's because she has found that the world is not entirely composed of Maurice Weybrooks and that she's outgrown the frame of mind in which she thought of marriage with such a man as a possibility."

Lady Parkstone got up from the sofa and rang the bell for tea.

"I don't agree with you about Maurice," she said, "and I don't agree with you about Daphne, but you shall never say that I forced my own daughter to marry any man against her will. Daphne comes of age in November and the engagement is not going to be formally announced till then. She's got nearly five months for making up her mind. Can I say fairer than that?"

"Provided you don't try to influence her one way or the other. Give her a free hand, then whatever happens she'll only have herself to blame."

"And in November we shall see who was right."

The conversation was cut short by the arrival of two footmen with the tea. They were followed a few minutes later by Lord Parkstone, who entered the room in company with Maurice Weybrook. Lord Parkstone was five years older than his wife, and from his peaceful, unresisting manner it might be surmised that the sceptre of domestic government had long ago been wrested from his grasp. A thin, stooping figure, pale, clean-shaven face, peering, short-sighted eyes and high forehead, gave him the appearance of a

man who was always striving to be conscientious and always a shade undecided as to the direction in which his conscience was leading him. There was little vigour or quickness of wit in the face—he would have been the last to lay claim to either quality—and a certain pathetic admission of mental slowness was given in one instance by his close friendship with Weybrook, and in another by his untiring assertion that, like a certain statesman of the nineteenth century, he was handicapped throughout life by mixing with people whose brains moved twice as quickly as his own. His rank and wealth had been indispensable to him in surmounting his shortcomings of intellect and character, but they had only given him a start, and he had been carried the rest of the way by sheer high-mindedness and hard work. He had occupied several subordinate positions in the last Conservative government and it was felt that his claims to be included in the next Cabinet were considerable. At present his time was largely taken up in presiding over the final sittings of the Birth Rate Commission, of which he was chairman.

"Herbert," said Sir William, after shaking hands with the newcomers, "let me get you on one side for a few minutes' private chat. No, no, we needn't go out of the room. This sofa will do. Look here, first of all how goes the Commission?"

"The end of this week will see us through with the evidence. Then we have to find some common standpoint for our Report."

"You think you'll disagree?"

"I'm sure of it. My dear William, when your scope of reference is the 'Cause and Cure for the Stationary

Condition of the Birth Rate' you can drag in every fad that has ever crossed the mind of man, from sanitation reform and model dwelling-houses to horse-racing and the influence of Bradlaugh's writings. It's heart-breaking work."

"And I suppose to make the Commission thoroughly representative you've got every variety of political faith-healer and nostrum-monger that it was possible to find?"

"Pretty well. In a way that gives us our best chance of agreeing over our recommendations. When twenty faddists have finished scratching each other's eyes out, they may agree to sink their differences, exclude all short cuts to Utopia, and bring forward half a dozen sober, unimaginative, practical proposals. I'm rather counting on that, and I've already drawn up a draft scheme for the day when I can get them to listen to it."

Sir William lowered his voice confidentially.

"Have your scheme ready, by all means, and fling it to the faddists as a possible basis for compromise; but if you'll take my advice, you won't back it yourself."

"Not support my own scheme?"

"It won't be your own. You may come forward as the honest broker and suggest that it may reconcile some of your colleagues, but then you retire to your study, unearth your own particular fad . . ."

"I don't know that I've got one."

"Then you must find one. Herbert, I'm sure you don't recognise the possibilities of that Report. Man! it's not given to all of us to issue a new

programme or fuse a new party: it might be an everyday occurrence, to judge from your apathy."

"I don't know that I'm apathetic, but I don't quite grasp where the opportunity lies."

Sir William leant forward, resting a hand on his son-in-law's arm.

"Look at the state of parties! They've all gone into the melting-pot, and if a hard, serviceable weapon is to be made out of that seething mass of metal, why should you not make it? The Liberals are nearer disruption than they've been for a generation—they've been long enough in power to frighten their wealthy backers and exasperate Labour."

"They've done more for Labour in seven years than we did in twenty."

"What if they have? When did gratitude in politics become retrospective? The things for you to keep in the forefront of your mind are that Labour is trying to consolidate itself into a party of its own"—he ticked the points off on his fingers—"and they've no leaders, no leaders they'll follow, any way. The Liberals are overstocked with leaders, but they can't get a party that will consistently follow any one of them. And you Tories? You've got the party, you may have a leader or you may have to find one: you've assuredly got no programme. Anti-this, anti-that, it's a tissue of negatives. You've not got a single positive, constructive proposal to offer as an alternative. Take me as the average elector and put me in any social rank you like. Now, what earthly inducement are you going to suggest to make me vote for you? I'm a man of some property and you won't skin me. Very

well, that's all you can offer, and if I'm not a man of property, it won't make much of an appeal, will it ? "

" Well ? "

Sir William leant forward with outstretched hand.

" Why not back a likely winner for a change ? You must almost have forgotten the sensation. Why not a *mariage de convenance* with Labour ? They'll overrun everything as soon as they're organised : why shouldn't you bridle them ? Give them leaders, and in return——"

" Yes ? "

" Steal their clothes. Dish 'em, as old Dizzy dished the Whigs. Send them bathing, Herbert."

Lord Parkstone sighed wearily.

" I'm getting a little tired of new parties and new alliances. I'm only about half your age, William, but I've seen the old two-party system killed and damned and buried at least every other year of my life. Nothing much in the way of change, though, in spite of all."

" I know. A new party with a new world-sweeping programme is a commonplace of politics. You so seldom get a suitable opportunity, though. You've got it now, with your Commission. You can steal what articles of the Labour faith you like and make them your own, you can wheedle your colleagues on the Commission into agreeing on some pompous, colourless recommendations which will state in effect that this is the best of all possible worlds, and then—then comes your gospel."

" Making confusion worse confounded."

" Never mind about that. John Bright once said

that the worst of great thinkers was that they so often thought wrong. The British public takes the view that the worst of Majority Reports is that they are invariably wrong."

"Which is not the same as thinking that a Minority Report is invariably right."

"In theory, no: in fact, yes. Anyway the Minority Report is the only report they read. You remember the case of the Poor Law? Nothing much came of it, but the Minority Report is an armoury of suggestions for ardent young reformers to appropriate to their own use and carry through the land. The Majority Report invented a system of new labels for old abuses, and that was about all. My idea is that there's a fine opportunity for you to identify yourself with a comprehensive programme of social reform. As you say, there's no recommendation which cannot be tacked on to the Birth Rate question; your party badly needs a new social policy, and if you write something which strikes people's imagination, there's no limit to the power you may win for yourself."

"But, my dear William, I can't write a sort of new 'Social Contract.'"

"I don't suppose you can, that's why I'm here to-day. Think over what I've said and tell me your views when it's had time to sink in. No, you couldn't write it, you've become officialised. We want youth and imagination. Your old men shall dream dreams—that's me. And your young men shall see visions. If you come to me and tell me you think there's anything in my suggestion, I'll find you the man."

"Who is he?"

"I mustn't mention his name till I've approached him. A visionary, yes, but a visionary of the kind that writes extraordinarily sane and luminous books on politics. Very unusual insight, and quite a young man. Hallo, Daphne, how are you? Yes, we're coming to tea now."

They selected chairs near the tea-table, and Sir William made a leisurely scrutiny of Lady Daphne. There was no doubt about her looking ill and unhappy. Dark rings surrounded her brown eyes, there was a wistful droop to the mouth which made her seem always on the verge of tears, and all animation had gone out of her face and voice. In character, temperament, manner, and appearance she was the antithesis of his other granddaughter Sheila, and from a purely æsthetic point of view it might be argued that an expression of melancholy was that best suited to her features. It was a face of unusual beauty, delicately moulded and almost transparent in complexion. Her eyes were deep brown in colour, fringed with long lashes and of a surprising softness, the nose and mouth finely chiselled and betraying perhaps an undue sensitiveness, the hair of a deeper brown than the eyes and held close to the head by means of a single semi-circular bar of tortoise-shell stretching almost from ear to ear. If Rossetti could have seen the neck he would have risen from the grave to paint it, and he would have insisted on communicating to his canvas the grave, wistful expression which the face now wore.

Sir William brushed aside considerations of æsthetics and contented himself with the reflection that the present expression was abnormal. He had seen the

serious eyes suddenly take fire with delighted surprise and enthusiasm, and he felt that he could once again give himself the pleasure of that sight if a way were found of freeing her from the unwise commitment to which she was pledged. He glanced across the table at Weybrook, who was talking noisily to Lady Parkstone, and came to the unsatisfactory conclusion that however much Daphne might appreciate the unsuitability of Maurice as a husband, and however much her mother might speak of leaving her unrestricted liberty of action, such liberty would be of the most illusory order so long as Lady Parkstone herself betrayed such undisguised approval of the engagement which she had contrived.

His meditations were interrupted by the raucous voice of Weybrook himself.

"By the way, Sir William, I understand you and Sheila have been travellin' in company with my learned friend the pocket encyclopædia, otherwise known as Denys Playfair. I met him this afternoon and gathered that you and he'd been feedin' the fishes side by side through the Bay."

"Is that the man who wrote 'Foundations of Society'?" asked Lord Parkstone of Sir William.

"The same. Good book, I thought."

"Very. How do you come to know him, Maurice?"

"We were up at the House together. Bar none, he was the greatest glutton for work I've ever met. Made me feel quite sorry for him. Work! Why, I fancy I'm pretty ill-used when they turn me out of my downy bed at about five in the morning to go and inspect great chunks of raw meat and certify them as

fit for the British Army, but my brain would simply give a little click and that would be all, if I did the work he gets through. All to no purpose, either; he always crocks up. I remember goin' into his room one mornin' just before his finals. Found the feller in a dead faint with his head in the marmalade. I tell you, I never had such a shock in my life. I thought he'd pegged out. He hadn't, though, and he went in to the schools like a good 'un, but he only got a second and they had to send him off on a sea voyage to keep him from goin' potty. He got a Fellowship afterwards, but chucked it almost at once. 'Nother breakdown, I expect; flesh and blood couldn't stand the strain. At the end of every other term you could see him simply givin' out before your eyes; started stammerin', wrote his letters and repeated the same word three times running, went to the station and forgot where he wanted a ticket for, started dressin' for dinner and then in pure absence of mind put on his pyjamas and hopped into bed. I found him like that one night about nine o'clock, lying wide awake with the light on and all his dress-clothes neatly spread out on the bed on top of him. Poor devil, he couldn't sleep."

"He's got stronger now," put in Sir William.

"I don't know. He looked pretty cheap when I met him this afternoon. It's the same old game, burnin' the candle at both ends *and* in the middle. He still can't sleep and he gets restless and dashes about in fourteen different directions at the same time. Then you'll hear him start stammerin' and allowin' everything to worry him and you may look

out for another smash-up. Thank the Lord, nerves don't come my way."

"Do you see much of him now?" asked Lord Parkstone.

"Oh, I run across him in all sorts of unlikely places. Met him to-day comin' out of some club where all the literary bugs meet and gas about their books—dear old Denny slippin' in among them as if they were his nearest and dearest. I should have been speechless: books aren't my line, as Denny can tell you. He dragged me through Pass Mods. by the hair of my head, made me come to him, the brute, for half an hour each mornin' before breakfast and hurled Logic at me. 'All men are mortal; I am a man: therefore I am mortal.' Sounds so simple when you hear it. 'Barbara celarent Darii . . .' How does it go on? I've forgotten the rest."

"It's something of a distinction to have got you an arts degree, Weybrook," observed Sir William caustically.

"I believe you." Weybrook had no illusions on the subject of his intellectual attainments. "Speaks well for the good old B.A. Oxon., doesn't it? But Denny's a wonderful feller. You know him, Daphne, don't you?"

"I don't think so, Maurice."

"Oh, I saw him at your party the other night, so I thought you did. Look here, you ought to meet him; he'd interest you, he's one of the brainy lot, not like me. What are you doin' to-night? No, to-night's no good. Wednesday? No go, I'm guardin' the countless hordes of the Bank of England on Wednesday. What are you doin' on Thursday night?"

"I don't know yet."

"Well, I was thinking of dinin' at Ranelagh and tryin' to get cool. You come and I'll ring up Denny and we'll get a fourth and make a night of it. What d'you say?"

"I don't think I feel up to it, Maurice, thanks all the same." She spoke very wearily.

"What *are* you going to do, Daphne?" asked her mother impatiently. "Your father and I are dining out and you'll be all alone if you dine here."

"Come and dine with Sheila and me, Daphne," said Sir William gently. "We're keeping each other company by the domestic hearth."

Lady Daphne smiled wistfully.

"Thanks awfully, granddad. I don't feel as if I should want any dinner by Thursday, but may I leave it that I'll come if I feel up to it?"

"Just as you please, my dear. Come if you like, don't come if you don't like, but remember we shall be delighted to see you if you do come."

"Same here, Daphne," said Weybrook. "Don't kill the Ranelagh idea outright. I shall be goin' in any case and I'll invite Denny, and if you feel disposed to join us at 8.15, so much the better."

He got up to make his adieux.

"Good-bye, Lady Parkstone. May I make free with your telephone before I go? Good-bye, Lord Parkstone. Good-bye, Sir William. Au revoir, Daphne, and if we see you, we shall see you."

He waved a comprehensive hand and lounged out of the room. Sir William and Sheila gave him time to get out of the house and then followed.

"And that's the man your cousin is going to marry," he said as the car headed for Cleveland Row.

"Is he?" asked Sheila tranquilly. "For a man of your age, Father Time, you make some extraordinarily rash prophecies."

"Who's to prevent it?"

"Daphne, of course."

"She won't. She'd have done it months ago if she meant to."

"It wasn't worth her while."

"Who'll make it worth her while?"

"I shall."

"How?"

"My dear, you're asking a lot more questions than are good for you. Tell me, did you get Uncle Herbert to promise anything about your little friend Denys Playfair?"

"*My* friend?" repeated Sir William with an emphasis that made Sheila self-conscious. "Don't try to get away from the point, Sheila."

"I'm not." She sighed in pity for the obtuseness of men. "No, you don't see the connection, and you wouldn't understand if I told you, and if you did understand, you'd only muddle things. You'd better leave it to me."

"I propose to," said her grandfather, selecting a cigarette.

CHAPTER III

DINNER FOR TWO IN THE CAVE OF ADULLAM

" . . . that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life . . . . . .
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die."—TENNYSON: "ULYSSES."

"SHALL we see you at the Stapletons' later on?"

It was the night of Maurice Weybrook's projected party at Ranelagh and Lord Parkstone had looked in at his daughter's room on his way to a political dinner and an India Office reception. Lady Parkstone, aggressively premature, was already in the hall, proposing a vote of No Confidence in her Creator.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," said Daphne from the lazy depths of a low chair. "If I dine with Maurice's party I shan't bother to change: if I go to granddad's I suppose Sheila will make me go on with them."

"Don't go if you're not up to it," he said, bending down to kiss her.

"I'm all right, daddy, really I am. Only it's so hot to have to talk to people. Good-bye. I shall have made up my mind soon."

Left to herself Lady Daphne puzzled her brains to plumb the change which had taken place in her mother. For the first time in her recollection she had been left with perfect freedom to dispose of her evening as she liked. "You'd better take this latch-key if you're likely to be late," was Lady Parkstone's contribution to the dinner problem. Daphne had asserted the improbability of requiring it. "If not now, another night," her mother had replied with a ring of unconviction in her voice: "it's time you had one." Daphne sat looking at the key with the dissatisfaction of one who has had an undesired favour ungraciously thrust upon her. She did not want to keep late hours or lead any kind of clandestine existence. She would have liked her mother's sympathy and approval in all she did.

The difficulty was that Lady Parkstone regarded man and woman as being made for the London season, and Daphne had aspirations which caused her frequent qualms of conscience when she reckoned up the hours spent in the idle artificialities of social intercourse and considered how much more profitably they might have been employed in lessening the dead weight of human misery which she vaguely believed to exist all round her. She had never seen it because it was part of her mother's code that human misery was the self-sought punishment of the unworthy and that in any case there were properly constituted Poor Law, Lunacy, and Public Health authorities charged with their respective branches of social disease. Any desire for amateur interference she regarded as morbid

So Daphne chafed and dreamed and chafed again. The world was in loose, informal alliance with her mother to keep her blindfolded and ignorant; politics were eschewed till she had left the dinner-table with the rest of the ladies, and it seemed part of a secret code that the preachers, ministers, authors, and sociological explorers who were invited for the famous Sunday luncheons in Berkeley Square, should be locked and barred out of the territory they had made their own, and condemned to vapid discussion of current drama and recent fiction. Wistfully she compared herself to a caged bird whose wings have grown powerless through long captivity. Her mother had presented her with a tangible key and ostentatiously left her to her own devices. The change in her position was unappreciable: she did not know how to bring herself into touch with anyone who could direct her energies into the proper channel. Her new-found liberty frightened her. In time, no doubt, she would get used to it. But as she turned on a hat and slipped quietly out of the house and line—not with Maurice or her grandfather, but herself—her conscience told her that she was prompted less by the pleasurable excitement of novelty than by a dutiful desire not to waste opportunities or give in to the shrinking timidity which seemed to clog every effort to ennoble her life with usefulness or independence. Ruefully she was forced to admit that her regeneration was opening under the most dispiriting auspices.

As she walked southward into Piccadilly and northeastward up Shaftesbury Avenue, the problem where to dine was exercising another mind within two mile

of her. Denys Playfair, in shirt and trousers, was staring out of the library window of his flat in Buckingham Gate, realising how hopeless and depressing life could be even on a sunny May evening with the trees in the park below him richly green and restfully cool. His gloom was only relieved by the memory that he had refused Maurice Weybrook's invitation to dinner; in his present mood, to talk or listen or laugh was beyond his powers. It had been a day of exasperation: first an examination by his doctor, who told him with stern candour that the benefit derived from his winter abroad had already disappeared and that he would infallibly break down afresh unless he showed some moderation in the work he was doing. Beyond affording an opportunity of including the medical profession in his comprehensive disgust with mankind, the information had given him no encouragement: it lacked even the charm of novelty; his hollow eyes, sunken cheeks, and intermittent cough were as eloquent as any doctor's warning.

From Harley Street he had hurried to the City and fretted through the interminable irritations of a board meeting. His colleagues rawed his nerves with their tricks of speech and solemn stupidity, and his annoyance was none the less keen for the knowledge that it was unreasonable, childish, unworthy. But they were so slow and unimaginative, so few possessed any real knowledge of business, and the managing director, of whom at least some superiority might be expected, was carrying the board with him along a road which Denys firmly believed led ultimately to a public enquiry and the dock. There had been the usual

wrangle, the usual loss of temper, an interchange of personalities, and a hint of resignation.

As usual, Sir William in the chair had smoothed away their differences, but the crisis had only been postponed. When a managing director was paid by results and took advantage of his colleagues' ignorance to accept wild risks, make no increase in reserve for liabilities, and keep the Company's securities at a swollen, undepreciated figure, the final débâcle was but a question of time. Denys would have resigned before that day, but how to support himself after the loss of his directorship was a problem of which he had as yet found no solution.

From the board meeting he had returned home and tried to concentrate his mind on the deadlock in "Modern Democracy." The words would not come, his nerves were excited, and after a wasted hour he turned to the mechanical, soul-deadening task of correcting proofs. Even this failed to hold his attention: the memory of the tumultuous meeting, the flushed, angry face of the managing director kept rising to disturb him. When he resigned he would be uncomfortably near the rocks . . . Pushing aside the long slips of proofs he strode up and down his long library. Technically he could afford to live in Buckingham Gate, inasmuch as his rent was paid and he owed no man. In fact, it was an extravagance justified solely by a stubborn refusal to take less than what he considered his due share of the world's comforts. Perhaps it was the memory of the grey stone castle where he had been born, perhaps the inherited memory of the Playfairs who had lived there since Henry VIII.

granted them the land: when starvation ceased to haunt him, his first step had been to acquire a home of which he needed to feel no shame—spacious, dignified, raised loftily beyond the reach alike of those who sneered and those who patronised. It was symbolical of everything that lent a pride to life: not until he had been beaten to his knees would he compromise with his self-respect. The price was heavy, and in all his years of poverty he had never consented to learn economy or accept the inevitable; and casting a shadow over all his work was the knowledge that another breakdown in health would leave him unable to satisfy his creditors—or live out his dream . . .

Sometimes, when he looked at his life in perspective, the responsibility of his task seemed overwhelming: a single frail body and weary brain were entrusted with the duty of vengeance; when the goal was reached or his strength had proved insufficient, the family with all its obstinate brilliance and perverse charm would end in his person, and till that day he was doomed to live in loneliness, asking sympathy of none and admitting none to his confidence. Great as was the terror of annihilation and the thought that he would never have wife to comfort or son to succeed him, the haunting terror of loneliness was still greater. Between him and solitude was an old-fashioned portrait of a young man with thin, sensitive face, troubled and reproachful eyes. It hung over the mantelpiece. The mouth was irresolute, but the broad, thoughtful forehead gave promise of big intellectual achievement. That promise had never been fulfilled,

as the young man had been found guilty of murder and sentenced to death before he was thirty.

Turning wearily from the window Denys sank into a hot bath and then began dressing for dinner. The process was still incomplete when he recognised that the last thing he wanted to do was to dine ponderously at his club and listen to the slow, nerveless gossip of the encrusted habitués. He must dine with his own low spirits or take his chance of meeting someone who would at least keep him from awaking to the grotesque realities of his existence. Changing into an old tweed suit and soft felt hat he jumped into a taxi and drove to a little-known restaurant in Greek Street which he had been wont to patronise in the days of journalism and intenser poverty.

"La Reine Pedauque," so christened by him in pious memory of Anatole France, had sacrificed some of its primitive Bohemianism as a concession to insular prejudices. Square, green tubs of dwarf palms were ranged outside the muffled-glass windows, and most of the white-aproned waiters could speak English with tolerable fluency. But the sanded floor remained, dress-clothes still exposed the wearer to suspicion, it was still possible to smoke a pipe after dinner (though Petits Caporals predominated), an orchestra was not yet contemplated, electric light—at Denys' urgent prayer—was still excluded in favour of candles, and no diner would have been admitted a second time if at his entry and exit he failed to exchange a few words with Madame.

Denys, who enjoyed the privileges of a favourite and was always addressed by Madame as "mon p'tit,"

in spite of his six feet of humanity, was a guest desired and beloved. Taking off his hat with a bow he charged her with not remembering him.

"But, monsieur, small blame to me if I did forget you when you come to me so seldom now."

"No, Madame, you are getting proud and prosperous. Look at your house—not a seat to spare and not a memory for your oldest friend. And you never used to call me 'monsieur.'"

"How was I to know you hadn't got married in all this long time? M'dame Playfair would not like to hear me calling you 'mon p'tit.'"

"As if I should get married and you not at my wedding!"

"Ah, you all of you come and go, and poor old Madame never sees you again. There are none of the old friends here to-night that I used to have when we opened La Reine."

"We wander abroad for a time, Madame, but we return to our first loves as I am returning to-night. And then we find that you have got new friends and there is no place for us."

"Ah, mon p'tit, that you should say that! Look in the corner by the window, a little table à deux. The little lady has almost finished and she will not mind your sharing her table if I tell her you are one of my friends."

Denys followed the direction of her plump, beringed finger and saw a girl sitting by herself in the farthest corner of the room. She seemed to be about twenty years of age and was dressed in a white coat and skirt and large black hat. The clothes were of a more

fashionable cut and expensive material than were usually seen at the Reine, and the pale face with its large, wistful eyes and crown of brown hair seemed out of place among the vivacious, chattering daughters of the South who formed Madame's most permanent clientèle. The face was familiar to Denys, though for the moment he could not recall when or where he had last seen it.

"Who is she, Madame?" he asked. "A new customer?"

"She has never been here before, monsieur. She is not of the same genre as my others. I expect she comes to see what it is like and to tell her friends she has had an adventure." Madame discouraged the presence of the non-Bohemian element.

"But if you have given her a good dinner, Madame, she will come again and bring her friends, and that is all sous in Madame's stocking. Was it a good dinner? Do you still give good dinners, Madame?"

"Go and sit down by the little lady, mon p'tit, and you shall see what the Reine can do. A bisque?" Denys nodded. "Sole à la reine?" He nodded again. "Omelette aux champignons? and fromage?"

"And coffee, Madame. Do you still make the coffee yourself?"

"Not as a rule, monsieur; I am too busy keeping these lazy men to their work. But to-night . . . and for you, mon p'tit!"

"And for the little lady, Madame. She looks unhappy. She will never be happy again if she comes to the Reine and does not taste your coffee."

A fat, good-natured laugh was the reply, and she

bustled away to the baize-covered door which led to the kitchen. Already in better temper and piqued with curiosity to know the identity of his fellow-diner, Denys threaded his way through the maze of little tables to the corner where the girl was seated watching him.

The course of conversation between Denys and Madame had been attentively watched and in part overheard by the girl in the white cloth coat and skirt and the large black hat. She had found time in the course of her dinner to exhaust her examination of the other patrons of La Reine Pedauque, and the arrival of Denys had come as an opportune diversion. Unlike herself, he was dressed in a manner which was in perfect keeping with his surroundings, and she amused herself for an idle minute with wondering who and what he could be. The thin, classic face with its pale colouring, its deep-set, dark eyes, its thin-lipped, sensitive mouth and expression of nervous alertness aroused her interest, though she found herself seized with ungovernable shyness and a sinking sensation of detected guilt when he followed the direction of Madame's pointing finger and approached the vacant seat at the opposite end of her table.

"If this chair is not engaged, may I take it?" he began. "I apologise for breaking in on the privacy of your meal, but La Reine has grown so popular that it can hardly accommodate all its clients."

The girl murmured an inaudible acquiescence, and then, not wishing to appear resentful at the intrusion, remarked:

"They seem to do a wonderfully good business here."

"Madame is an excellent manager; I hope she has given you a good dinner. She tells me this is your first appearance here and I shouldn't like you to go away dissatisfied. Indeed," he smiled apologetically, "as I arrived too late to superintend the choice of your dinner, I took the liberty of interfering with its final stages and insisting on Madame serving you with coffee of her own making."

"It's something to be an habitué," said the girl, responding easily to the frank friendliness of his tone.

"Oh, Madame and I are old friends. I say, if you've finished, may I smoke a cigarette till my soup comes? Thanks so much. Yes, I feel like a godfather to La Reine, inasmuch as I chose the name and gave it a column and a half of advertisement in one of the evening papers."

"And now you've deserted it for pastures new. I heard Madame reproaching you."

"Well, it's rather changed in the last three years. We used to have great fun in the old days when first it opened, half a dozen of us who came here every night for supper. We had two leader-writers from two daily papers on the opposite sides in politics, a barrister, an actor, a remittance-man who'd quarrelled with his father and was subsisting on whatever he could make, in whatever way he could devise, and myself. And here we sat consuming poached eggs and Welsh rarebits and talking about everything in heaven and earth and the waters under the earth till closing-time."

The girl was smiling at his recital and as she smiled a tiny dimple appeared in each cheek. In a flash it came to Denys' mind where he had last seen that smile.

"And what has happened to you all now?" asked the girl, in happy ignorance that her identity had been betrayed.

"Oh, we're scattered to the four winds and some of us have degenerated into respectability. The actor is touring in Australia, both the journalists are married, the remittance-man disembarrassed himself of his father and succeeded to a peerage, and the barrister is undergoing a term of imprisonment for obtaining money under false pretences. No, it wasn't that; barristers haven't enough imagination. I forget now what his crime was. I'm sorry our supper-table was broken up: matrimony and private means are the great stumbling-blocks in a young man's path, and as neither came our way in those days we were ready to throw ourselves light-heartedly into any adventure that offered. However, I'm afraid this is not very interesting to you."

"Oh, do go on!" The tone was so earnest that Denys looked up in some surprise. The girl was sitting with her elbows on the table and her hands clasped under her chin, drinking in every word with wide-eyed enjoyment. She flushed a little at her own eagerness, and went on explanatorily:

"You see, I never meet people who do things, and I never do anything myself. When you were a little boy, did you get all the books of travel in the house and read them in bed? *I* did. If I couldn't see the

places themselves, I could at least read about them. And it's the same with people. I'd give anything to be a man and choose my own life, but as I can't do that, I do love to hear what other people do."

"Well, it doesn't sound much, though I enjoyed it at the time. I was a Special Correspondent and used to get sent anywhere that there was good 'copy' to be obtained. I did a little cattle-driving in Ireland, and took part in a South Wales coal-strike, and floated about in the Paris floods, and got involved in a Suffragette raid on the House, and flew half-way across the Channel on an aeroplane, and assisted in a hunger march and a presidential election and a revolution in Constantinople. That was the time they got rid of Abdul Hamid. And I helped at a pogrom in Odessa—that was in holiday time, though. Four of us signed on before the mast of a Black Sea tramp and got to Odessa just in time to lend a hand in exterminating the Jews. But now, as I said before, we've most of us degenerated into respectability."

"But why?" Her voice was plaintively disappointed.

"Well, our remittance-man lost his taste for wandering when he'd got a substantial income and landed estate and a peerage, and our journalists married wives who gave them an exaggerated idea of the value of their lives to the community."

"But you've not given it up?"

"I had to: the doctors said it was too much for me. Not that I minded that, we've all got to die some time, but it wasn't much fun doing it single-handed, so I rolled up my tent and sold my camp bedstead

and blossomed out into the prosperous man of business."

"And don't you ever meet here for an annual dinner or anything?"

"We've grown prosaic and unsentimental. When any one of us comes here he comes alone, and for the reason that I came to-night—the reason, by the way, that brought you."

"And what's that?" she asked with a smile.

"We get into a state of acute nervous depression and want a place where we can hide ourselves and nobody knows us and we're surrounded by strange faces and needn't open our unsociable mouths to a living soul. Incidentally I'm afraid I've deprived you of the last-named boon."

"Never mind. I've deprived you of the blessings of obscurity." She gave a surprisingly good imitation of Madame's comfortable and good-tempered voice: "How do I know that you've not been getting married in all this long time? Madame Playfair would not like to hear me calling you 'mon p'tit.'"

"Ah, but what's in a name if it conveys nothing?"

"But perhaps it does. Is the Christian name Denys?"

"Tell me why you ask and I'll tell you if you're right."

"Well, if it's Denys, I heard your praises being sung the other afternoon. If it's not Denys the praise belongs to someone else."

"I must hear what the praises were before I decide whether they're worth appropriating."

"The vanity of it! That gives you away and I've got the advantage of you."

Denys threw away his cigarette and addressed himself to the soup.

"I fancy not, though I was being kind and respecting your secret. You know the story of King Edward going incognito to the opera in Paris? He hated being followed by a crowd of satellites when he was supposed to be incognito, so one night he slipped his collar and went off to the opera without saying where he was going. It was a complete success. He wandered into the foyer and strolled round the circle and not a soul recognised him. Poligni was singing, and singing her best. Somebody from the box office congratulated her afterwards and asked her if she knew she had been singing to royalty. She said yes, and a less appreciative audience than a house full of detectives it had never been her misfortune to meet. One seat had been taken by the king: the whole of the rest of the house was filled with fashionably attired gens-d'armes. Since that time I've appreciated the sacredness of an incognito, Lady Daphne."

"How did you know?" The animation had gone out of her face and was succeeded by an expression of disappointment and timidity.

"You gave me a gracious welcome at the Ritz on Friday in respect of which my cards are now adorning the table in your hall. That is, unless your grandfather forgot to leave them the other afternoon. But you mustn't make me think I've spoilt your evening: it was a bit of a surprise finding you here, but I won't

tell a living soul, honour bright, I won't. And what's a great deal harder, I won't even ask why you're here—at your age—at this hour—all alone—in mid season!"

For a moment she sat in silence, wondering whether to admit him to her confidence; then she asked:

"Had you any engagement to-night?"

"About fifteen," said Denys with a groan. "I may yet live to keep some of them, though I fear it's too late for repentance on the subject of Maurice Weybrook's dinner."

"I was invited to that, too—invited to meet you. Maurice told me you were one of the brainy people . . ."

"And that finished you. Maurice has no business to disseminate charges of that kind."

"I didn't feel worthy."

"When you take the trouble to hide yourself in the inaccessible fastnesses of Soho to avoid meeting a man at dinner, it's a little hard if he comes and sits down at the same table. And the worst of it is that I've no intention of going unless you absolutely order me away."

"I shan't do that." His gentle tone made her forget her timidity, and the nervous expression of weary restlessness in his eyes forced her to feel in some fashion sympathetic and akin. "I asked if you'd any engagement for to-night because I was wondering if you ever got so tired of dining out, and dancing, and talking the same silly talk that it was all you could do to keep from screaming. That's how I felt this evening."

"That's how you've been feeling a good many times before this evening."

"Have I?" She spoke defiantly, but the defiance wavered before his steady gaze. Denys shrugged his shoulders.

"You wouldn't have risked being found out, you wouldn't have screwed up courage to come here the first time you had the feeling."

"I suppose not." She sighed. "It's bad to be a coward and it's worse to know you're a coward. If I wasn't always afraid . . ."

"What of?"

"Oh, everything. I'm afraid of offending people or hurting their feelings. I hate being found fault with. 'Tisn't that I want to do anything I oughtn't, but I can't do the things I know I ought to do, because relations and people are always making difficulties. They can't understand that I want to do some good . . ." She sat nervously making bread pellets. Sometimes . . . when you've time to think, it's simply awful to see the kind of life you're leading. You get up in the morning and have a maid to do your hair and dress you . . . as if you couldn't do it yourself! As a matter of fact, I've almost forgotten how to. And men to wait on you and bring you food. Mr. Mayfair, doesn't it make your blood boil to see strong, able-bodied men wearing liveries and wasting themselves on things like opening carriage doors and tucking in rugs?"

"Candidly, no," said Denys with a smile. "If a man's a footman, it's because he has the menial spirit. Nature's wonderful at helping us to find our

level. If I drift through life as a director of an insurance company, say, it means that I'm fit for nothing better. If I rise above that . . . "

"Then that means my lot in life is to be pampered and bemaided, wasting other people and wasting myself, so that I may have leisure to lunch out and dine out and go to the opera and dance and stay in stupid houses and wander about behind a lot of men with guns . . . "

"Not a bad life, many would say."

"You wouldn't."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Well, why aren't I allowed to be of some use? The world isn't so perfect that it can afford to waste even me. And it isn't so rich that it can afford to squander money as I—all of us—squander it. The money we spend on clothes and food alone . . . it really makes me quite sick sometimes. And the poor girls who make the clothes, they're underpaid and underfed and overworked and have to live in horrid, poky little rooms. It isn't fair to say they're fit for nothing else; they haven't had the chance. If you said I was fit for nothing but living on their labour and being utterly useless it would be nearer the truth. Even then it wouldn't be quite true. I do want to make things more comfortable for people who haven't as much to make them happy. Only I don't see how it's to be done. Mother only laughs at me and tells me not to be morbid when I try to explain how I hate doing nothing except spend money and pretend I'm enjoying myself. It isn't right . . . and I should be afraid to talk to

her as I've been talking to you. Oh, how I wish I were a man!"

"With your livelihood to earn?"

"Yes."

Denys looked up into the earnest brown eyes and shook his head slowly.

"That's as near blasphemy as you're likely to get. Only people who have their living to earn know how hard the struggle sometimes is."

"Then we'd better be weeded out. Take Maurice, take me. If we can't show enough character to hold our own and keep from going under, we're better out of the way. And you know we couldn't . . . we have to be coddled from the moment of our birth, people waiting on us and working to provide us with money. And we spend it on ourselves and wear expensive clothes and give extravagant parties. And then we marry and another generation comes on the scene and the old useless story's repeated. I do feel I was meant for something better than that. And if that's all I'm fit for," she shrugged her shoulders despairingly, "what's the good of being born?"

Denys cut a cigar and looked round for matches.

"What is it you want to do?"

"How do I know? Everything's strange to me, I know absolutely nothing about life except what you see of it—well, living as I do. A lot of men and girls hurrying from one entertainment to another, then marrying and teaching their children to look on life from exactly the same standpoint. First of all I want to meet the people who do the work of the world, I want to see how other people live. I want to

hear other people's opinions. We all live in a groove at home . . . That's the first thing, and when I've seen something of what the real working world is like I might be able to say whether there was any place in it for me." She sat silent for a moment, stirring the dregs of her coffee. "And as long as I live at home, I don't see how it's to be done. There are moments when I seriously think of running away and making a career for myself."

Glancing at her watch she called to a passing waiter for her bill. Denys picked up his hat and walked with her to the door.

"Are you going home now?" he asked.

"I suppose so," she said with a regretful sigh, "and yet I should love to wander about and explore. This is my first night of freedom and I hate to think of going back. Of course it seems nothing to you, you're a man, but it's a new world to me. Good-night." She held out her hand and then added with an apologetic smile: "How I must have bored you, talking about myself like this!"

"I've never enjoyed an evening more," he replied truthfully. "It's a new sensation to find anyone as dissatisfied with life as I am."

"Well, you won't tell anyone you've met me here, will you?"

"Not a soul." He paused and then added diffidently: "I'd be the last man to interfere with your independence, Lady Daphne, but do you know, I think you'd better let me be your escort. The purlieus of Soho at ten o'clock are not quite the place for a young girl who has yet to find her way about them." He

saw she was hesitating, and added casually: "I know my London pretty well by night, and if you want to see how the other half of the world lives and the way the world's work goes on and how it looks when you're in bed, I may be able to introduce you to one or two places where you wouldn't be admitted by yourself."

"Are you sure there's nothing you want to do instead?"

"Quite sure, thanks. We'll go across Soho Square and Soho Street into Oxford Street and a taxi shall bear us into the unknown."

Lady Daphne was silent till they reached Oxford Street. Then she exclaimed:

"Don't let's take a taxi, Mr. Playfair, let's walk. We can see so much more if we walk, and I want to have a look at all these funny little streets."

"It's all one to me," said Denys. "Look here, we haven't decided yet where we're going or how long we're going to take over it. When do you propose to resume habits of domesticity?"

"Oh, not for hours yet. I've got a latch-key."

"Right; then we can map out our evening. You must avoid the West-end and all the theatre and restaurant area, or it's long odds you may run into someone you know, and then good-bye to freedom for evermore. I don't recommend north of the Euston Road or south of the river; it's very dull and rather squalid. I suggest that we explore some of the less-known and more populous quarters of Soho, and then—Have you ever seen a newspaper brought to birth?"

She shook her head.

"Then we'll call on the *Newsletter* and I'll take

you over the office. I've got a friend there who adorns the editorial chair. Then—have you ever been to Covent Garden Market?"

Again she shook her head.

"I've been nowhere."

"Well, when we've finished with the *Newsletter* we drive eastward and see the City by night. It's worth it, just by way of contrast with what it's like by day, and the contrast will be more marked after leaving Fleet Street. That will fill in a certain amount of time. I don't recommend Billingsgate or Leadenhall or Smithfield in the early hours of the morning, but you shall see them if you want to. I would rather suggest picking up a little supper somewhere and then having a look at Covent Garden. After that we'll see what the Embankment can do in the way of soup kitchens and Salvation Army shelters and suicide bureaus, and then it will be time to think seriously of returning home to our neglected beds."

As he sketched out his programme, Denys beg enter into the spirit of the escapade and to feel a little of the excitement and enthusiasm which was shining in Lady Daphne's eyes. Without wasting more time on speech they retraced their steps, and entered Shaftesbury Avenue. For Lady Daphne the next hour was one of inexhaustible delight: she was intoxicated with the novelty of the narrow, ill-lit streets crowded with picturesque foreigners speaking in strange tongues, the windows in Seven Dials filled with live-stock, the endless succession of cafés and curio shops, all alike and yet each a little different from the last, the groups of black-haired Italian children dancing to the music of a

piano-organ while their fathers stood smoking in shirt sleeves and leaning against the door-posts, and their mothers busied themselves with marketing for vegetables, meat, and fish from the rows of open barrows that stretched almost from side to side of the narrow streets and made walking a slow and uneasy method of progress. Denys had spent more time wandering about the streets and alleys of Soho than of any other neighbourhood, and was able to follow a route of bewildering perplexity, chosen principally for the effectiveness of its contrasts and its unlikeness to any other part of London. He showed Lady Daphne how two minutes' walk from a brightly-lit, teeming thoroughfare such as Regent Street, characteristically English and hall-marked with opulence, led to a squalid and silent court where an olive-skinned Spaniard sat nursing her child on a doorstep, how the court opened on to a narrow street which led in turn to a rag-market, where women of every race picked over the goods exposed for sale and the incongruous presence of a stolid policeman was the only reminder that the scene was laid in London rather than Rome or Paris, Naples or Port Said. The lateness of the hour was the only argument that he could use to keep her childish eagerness from prolonging their rambles well on into the morning.

"If we're to reach Fleet Street before all the offices are closed," he had to remind her, "we must get under way at once."

"I suppose so," she murmured regretfully, and then on a sudden impulse: "Promise me you'll bring me here again some other night."

He gave a laughing promise as he helped her into a taxi, and they drove in silence to the office of the *Newsletter*, Lady Daphne lost to the world in the depths of a delicious reverie. At the office Denys laid hands on an office-boy and despatched him with a message to the editor.

"Take the card in," he said, "and tell Mr. Marjoribanks that I don't want to disturb him but that I've brought a lady who's never been over a newspaper-office, and if he has no objection I should like to show her round. Tell him I won't get up to mischief," he added.

The boy disappeared and returned almost immediately with ample permission for Denys to roam at large over the office, and an invitation to call in at the editor's room before leaving.

For half an hour Lady Daphne spoke no word. Room by room and floor after floor, she explored the whole building, with wide-open eyes that missed nothing, and head attentively bent to catch the murmured explanation which Denys poured into her ear. The office was in a state of suppressed bustle and half-heard excitement, the compromise effected between a theory that writing and thinking must be done in quiet and that machinery is inseparable from noise. He showed her the pill-box rooms of the leader-writers, sparsely furnished with roll-top desks, revolving chairs, telephones and electric fans; the long office where a harassed sub-editor strove to reduce an over-set paper to the limits of a normal issue; the composing-room brilliantly lit and insufferably hot, with consumptive-looking compositors setting up headlines by hand. For

a while they observed the marvellous mechanism of the composing-machines at work and—until the noise drove them downstairs again—watched the first casting of the type, and from that the making of the moulds, and from those the final casting of the plates. As they walked downstairs to call on the editor, they could hear through double partitions the muffled monotone of a proof-reader's voice : hurrying office-boys dashed to and fro with damp slips of proof and flimsy late " Exchange " telegrams, and then they were once more in silence and a tall Yorkshireman was asking Lady Daphne her impressions of a newspaper-office on the first visit.

It was not until the rotaries were finally at work, not until a seemingly unending roll of white paper had begun to vanish under a whirling drum, and a moist early copy of the *Newsletter* had been placed in her hand, miraculously printed, folded and trimmed, not until she had read that among those present at that hour at Lady Stapleton's ball were the Earl and Countess of Parkstone and Lady Daphne Grayling, that she allowed herself to be led into Fleet Street and assisted into a taxi from the stand by St. Clement Dane's church.

" You appear to have established an alibi all right," said Denys. " When your parents charge you with wandering through the midnight streets of London in company with a total stranger, you can point out that, on the authority of no less a journal than the *Newsletter*, you were present with them at Lady Stapleton's ball. Perhaps you will be, perhaps it was just ' intelligent anticipation.' I shall probably end

up the evening there: I have not missed my final supper of two poached eggs at the Ritz for weeks, and I'm not going to begin now."

She was almost too much occupied with her own thoughts to hear him.

"Those machines," she said, half to herself, "how many revolutions a minute? It doesn't matter, but it explains all my grumblings at dinner. Nowadays everything is done by machinery and done so quickly that some of us have an enormous lot of time on our hands and we simply don't know what to do with ourselves. I came up from Devonshire last week: thirty miles an hour to the station, sixty miles an hour in the train. A century ago I should have come by coach at—what—twelve miles an hour the whole way if we were making a record, and several nights on the road. And I should probably spend half my time spinning and sewing and doing all the things that are done by machinery nowadays. There must be a whole heap of girls in just the same position."

"There are, and it's something not to be one of the girls with a great deal of leisure and tolerable uncertainty where the next meal is coming from."

"I suppose so. Yet, I don't know, it would at least give an interest to life. I feel morally overfed."

"Better than being physically hungry."

"Were you ever that?"

"Twice," said Denys briefly. "I don't want it again."

At Tower Bridge they got out and stood for a moment watching the long narrow barges gliding silently through the water. At her suggestion the

taxi was dismissed, and for a while they wandered through the lifeless streets. Trinity Square, the Customs House and Monument were wrapped in an unreal and ghostly silence; at the Royal Exchange they met a stream of motor-omnibuses carrying their last passengers to Liverpool Street Station; on the Embankment the brightly-lit, two-storeyed trams were collecting belated suburbans for delivery in the unlovely wilds of South London. It was too early for the market in Covent Garden, but in a side street off the Strand Lady Daphne had her first and only meal off a coffee-stall, and as they walked northwards, the streets all round the market were blocked with towering produce-carts. Little was said as they strolled through the dim, open space round the market, inhaling the sour, earthy smell of refuse vegetation; occasionally Denys was recognised and accosted by a friendly porter or policeman, and in Garrick Street he suggested taking Lady Daphne back to Berkeley Square in the solitary three-wheeled hansom which stands patiently night after night at the door of the Garrick Club. Once more she preferred walking, and they made their way through Leicester Square and along Piccadilly in almost unbroken silence.

The excitement of their escapade was wearing off and both had grown reflective as their minds dwelt on the incongruity of the other's position. The variety and reality of his life were the qualities which Daphne envied him and found most wanting in the men who gathered under her mother's roof in Berkeley Square, and with all his untrammelled possibilities he was yearning for just that slothful wealth and sluggish ease

which made her own existence seem so hopeless and wasted. Wandering westward along the Embankment they had dropped into politics, and his intimate knowledge and fearless originality had delighted her by contrast with such unimaginative, official views as she was permitted occasionally to hear from her father's friends. But the originality and knowledge were those of a student, and his heart was buried in the library where his own unfinished books lay in long, dusty neglect. He lacked every spark of her own passionate enthusiasm and she found herself bemoaning the wasted talent and conjuring up dream pictures of a world conquered and reformed if he would but submit to her inspiration.

Thoughtfully smoking as he walked, Denys smiled at the irony which called her forth from the restful, scholarly leisure he had almost forgotten, and unsettled her mind with doubts and aspirations. An oversensitive conscience was destroying her happiness as it had destroyed his own and his father's: but for that he might be sitting unharassed and at ease in the castle that had been sold to provide funds for an incendiary political league. Recognising her talent for self-questioning and torment, he pitied her profoundly. It was impossible for anyone to look into the soft depths of her brown eyes, to see the wistful droop of the mouth, without wanting to comfort and be kind to her: and Denys felt strong sympathy with anyone who shared his sentiment of rebellion against the whole order of an ill-contrived universe.

For the time Lady Daphne was standing in no need of comfort; her eyes were still bright with the excite-

ment and novelty of her adventure, a smile of happy contentment played round her mouth and pressed tiny dimples into her cheeks. She was charmed with her new friend and delighted to meet a man who could talk as frankly and widely and intimately as Denys had done. There was hardly a topic they had left untouched in the course of their wanderings in Soho or the City; what had been overlooked in the "Reine Pedauque" seemed to have been picked up in the *Newsletter* office. It was incredible that she had never exchanged a word with him till nine o'clock that night: like her cousin and her grandfather, like the friends he had made at Oxford and the men with whom his books and his work brought him in contact, she had surrendered unconsciously to the compelling magnetism of the dreamy, deep-set eyes and melodious voice. Intimately as she had unburdened herself to him, knowing that he would understand her, she knew also that she would on occasion come to him for sympathy and advice as to no other man.

As they turned from Piccadilly into Berkeley Street, their minds, travelling by different roads, came to the same point at the same moment.

"Poor Maurice!" said Daphne. "Between us I'm afraid we've rather spoilt his party."

"Poor Maurice, yes," said Denys. He had seen enough of Daphne to appreciate the ludicrous unsuitability of their engagement: in time Daphne too would appreciate it and screw up her courage to tell him her mind was changed. And even Maurice had his share of sensitiveness. "I think it was worth it, though."

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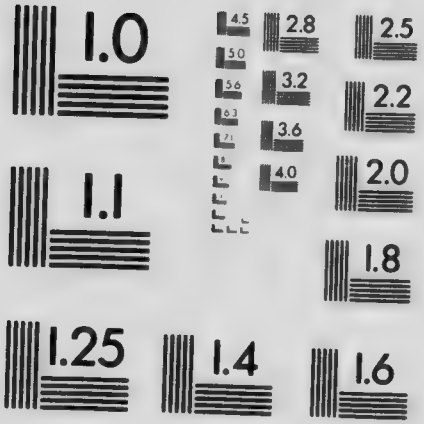

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"I know it was, but you haven't solved my Unemployed Problem for me yet."

"Have you ever taken any part in your father's work?"

"The Birth Rate Commission?"

"Well, social conditions generally. If you want to find out how the other half of the world lives, there's your opportunity, and I should think your father would support any suggestion you might make in favour of investigating at first hand. You certainly won't find time hanging on your hands if once you get infected."

"I wonder if I should like it."

"It will make you very unhappy, because you'll take it to heart instead of studying it as so much economic data. You'll learn the frightful cost of civilisation, the appalling price that other people have to pay in death and ill-health and misery and vice, and injustice, which is harder to bear than any of them, to purchase that state of society in which you and I live with tolerable comfort and enjoyment. It'll make you miserable, but it may keep you from running away."

"I'm afraid I should never have the courage to do that."

"I hope not."

"I'm only brave in my dreams."

"I'm not so sure. Your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions, and when a visionary is inspired by a conscience you get a crusader. Good-night, Lady Daphne; we shall meet again before long."

CHAPTER IV

SHEILA TAKES POLITICS UNDER HER PROTECTION

"The great advantage which women have in the world is that most women understand men a vast deal better than any man understands women. Since knowledge is power, woman has a control over man which man never has over her. To man she is always, in the last resort, untamable, and unintelligible, whereas to her man is a simple if massive, creature whose subtleties, when occasionally he is subtle, are much more intelligible to her than to other men. There is no complexity of the male character which the woman does not understand and there is scarcely any complication of the feminine character which the man can really unravel. This accounts for the good humour with which a vast majority of women accept the crude, mechanical power which man exercises by his laws and political devices."

J. A. SPENDER: "COMMENTS OF BAGSHOT" (FIRST SERIES).

"THAT'S one of the narrowest things even I've brought off."

Preceded by a delicate perfume of Parma violets, followed and steadied by the anxious hand of a paternal porter, Sheila Farling had burst into the railway carriage as the train rapidly gathered motion, and now settled down with the utmost sang-froid to sort herself, her parasol, and jewel-case from the confused tangle in the far end of the compartment. Denys looked up at the intruder. Ten days had passed since his night of wandering with Daphne, and he was on his way to spend the week-end at Oxford.

"I always said you weren't fit to travel alone, Miss Sheila," he remarked, putting down his paper. "Some day when you've been cut in two and carried to two

different hospitals, the top half of you will send for me to admit I was right."

Sheila closed her eyes and folded her hands as in prayer.

"Of course this is pure providence, naked and unashamed. God is good; it's more than even I deserve. A familiar friend to talk to, a familiar toe to tread on . . . . I hope I didn't hurt you, but you know it had no business to be where it was, just where I wanted to tumble down . . . . What was I saying?"

"You were running through some of my more solid if less brilliant qualities, and you stopped because you noticed I wasn't smoking and the omission struck you as unusual. I'm all right now, you can go on. 'A familiar hand to push you on to the platform when you find a station that takes your fancy.' Where are you going to, and why don't you allow proper time to catch a train?"

Opening her eyes once more she settled herself in her corner.

"If you're going to sit in judgment on me I shall pull the communication-cord and fine you not exceeding five pounds. I arrived in plenty of time. Found myself a nice unoccupied first-class smoking carriage, settled down to look at the papers, and then who of all people should blow in but Maurice, our only Maurice, the happily unique! And I'm going to have three solid days with him at Riversley as it is."

"Serves you right for going in a smoker," said Denys severely.

"But, my dear," her hands were spread out in deprecating remonstrance, "the other carriages were

filled with crawling humanity, all of it under two, sticky, horrid little things. Ugh! there must be a baby show down the line somewhere. I suppose you're going to the Badstows' too?"

"No such cause for alarm."

"But why not? You'd just round off the party and bring in some much-needed fresh blood. It's an awful gathering of the clan. Little Lord Badstow, little Lady Badstow, and our Maurice; Father Time and me; Uncle Herbert, Aunt Margaret, and Daphne. Do come! I'll make it all right, and when you've saved me from Aunt Margaret and Maurice I'll let you talk to Daphne."

"Even on your introduction I'm afraid I should be regarded with suspicion."

"But you know everybody."

"Only Maurice and your grandfather and yourself."

"And Daphne."

"Oh, your cousin Lady Daphne; yes, I have met her."

"Excellent! Oh, that really was admirable, Mr. Playfair. What were you doing last Thursday night?"

"Wasn't that the night of Lady Stapleton's ball?"

"Yes, but you weren't there, and I was. Where were you?"

"Oh, wandering about."

"Alone? No, of course not. It's all right, Daphne told me all about it and I won't give you away. Mr. Playfair, don't you think Daphne's one of the most adorable things you've ever met? No answer. Dear, tactful, reticent creature doesn't like to commit itself. Well, you do anyhow, or if you don't it doesn't say

much for your taste in looks. My dear, she's the most beautiful girl you're ever likely to meet in all your born days. Do you appreciate that?"

"Yes."

"Right. Then don't you think it perfectly monstrous for that—that thing Maurice to go and think it's going to marry her?"

Denys chivalrously assumed the defensive on his absent friend's behalf.

"What's wrong with Maurice? He's a great friend of mine and I like him immensely. Very kind-hearted and good-natured, very easy to get on with. There's no reason why he and Lady Daphne shouldn't hit it off all right."

"He won't get the chance."

"Who'll stop him?"

"I shall. Ever since I got back to England I've developed quite a faculty for saving people from themselves. I'm going to save Daphne if I die in the attempt. Heaven knows what possessed him ever to propose to her, let alone her accepting him."

"I suppose he felt he must marry into the family. Very laudable ambition I call it."

Sheila leant back and surveyed him with an amused smile.

"Now what exactly does that mean, Mr. Playfair?"

"Exactly what it says." It was now ancient history, but at the time Denys had been carefully posted by Maurice in the progress of his attachment to Sheila up to the day when he had proposed and been dismissed with contumely.

"If Maurice ever told you . . . . Well, he did,

and what's more, I'd make him do it again for two pins."

"You won't get the chance."

"Chance, indeed! Maurice is the sort of thing that proposes at sight."

"An amiable weakness. But in fairness to Maurice," he added gently, "you should reserve your criticisms till he's present to answer them."

"We'll drop the subject the moment you see that he isn't to be allowed to marry Daphne."

"Surely that's a matter for him to settle with your cousin."

"It's a matter he won't have any chance of settling. We're going to settle it for them."

"Leave me out, please. I'm not worthy of being coupled with you."

"I never supposed you were," said Sheila pleasantly, "but I may be able to make use of you."

"Nous verrons, as the French say."

Sheila placed her feet on the cushion of the seat opposite her, borrowed a handkerchief to dust the patent leather toes of her shoes, and cast about for a source of amusement that would last for the rest of the journey. The previous week's meeting at La Reine had saved her the trouble of effecting a formal introduction, and for the present it was not necessary for her influence to be felt. The first act was opening the more favourably on that account, and though it gratified her despotic spirit to order the exits and entrances, arrange the business, and teach the players how to speak their lines, she was sufficient of an artist to refrain from intervention if their individual

interpretation of the parts showed any natural vigour or originality. The idea had come to her at Lady Parkstone's ball: she was sitting out with Denys and asking him his opinion of her cousin, whom he had just seen for the first time. His admiration had been rhapsodical, from anyone else it would have been exaggerated and absurd, about anyone else she would have resented it. But the world was encouraged to share her devotion to Daphne, and as he poured forth his praises of her eyes and hair, Sheila began to wonder whether the problem of Maurice had not solved itself. The idea could easily be tested: she had only to bring the two together and watch the effect on Daphne.

The encounter, though not of her contriving, had exceeded her most sanguine hopes. Denys must have been in good conversational feather to have impressed the reticent Daphne so deeply. Sheila had been treated to the whole story within twelve hours of its conclusion: her eyes bright with the memory, Daphne had spoken as though her meeting had been with one from another world. Sheila's affectation of indifference only served as a fresh stimulus: "He seems to have talked about himself a good deal," was her languid comment. "But you should have *heard* him, Sheila," was the reply, and she had to submit to an interminable second-hand recital of ancient and modern politics as Denys had discoursed of them in their leisurely ramble westward from Tower Bridge. A few more such meetings and Maurice's suit would be lost by default: and there would be no difficulty in securing that the meetings took place. Her grand-

father had already approached Lord Parkstone with a view to finding Denys some more congenial occupation than his directorship of the Anglo-Hibernian. When she put the idea in his mind, it had been without thought of Daphne; she was indulging a child's craving to see everyone as happy as herself. Her disinterested action was bearing good fruit already: whatever other results Sir William's appeal might produce, it would have the effect of establishing some degree of intimacy between Denys and the Parkstones. That conceded, she was prepared to let Daphne work out her own salvation with Denys at hand eager to help her.

"If you aren't going to the Badstows'," she began after a short silence, "you might at least tell me where you are going. Unless it's anything very discreditable."

Denys prepared himself for a searching examination.

"I'm going up to Oxford for the week-end, to stay with a learned, ancient historian."

"[illegible]re?"

"[illegible]ny do you want to know?"

"I might want to send hourly wires to ask how you were."

"Oh, very well then. New College."

"It sounds dull; you'd much better get out and come to the Badstows'."

"But it's absolutely essential that I should spend this week-end in Oxford."

"Why? Oxford's had to get on without you for several years, it could surely wait another week."

"It would be too late then. I've been offered an

appointment and I've got to give my answer on Monday, so between now and then I've got to do the thing I most hate doing, making up my own mind."

"But I thought you were a merchant prince and went off with Father Time twice a week to lunch with the Rothschilds."

"Hardly that, and I was never publicly acclaimed as a captain of commerce; but whatever I was I'm not that now. The City knows me no more."

He spoke with a note of despair in his voice as though shrinking from the prospect of another fresh start.

"What happened?" asked Sheila, becoming interested.

"They would tell you I resigned because I couldn't get my own way; I tell you that they're steering straight for the rocks and I'm not going to risk a Board of Trade Enquiry, so I got out before the crash, as they wouldn't alter their course. Oh yes, and we all lost our tempers and behaved like children, and it was a sickening business generally. And there's one cherished ex-colleague of mine going about . . . I hope I don't meet him on a dark night in a lonely lane; he'll put a knife in my back as sure as fate. I've never seen a man look more murderous."

"What had you done?"

"I told him he was misleading the board, and that upset *him*. And I told the board if they were worth a penny in the pound of the fees they drew they'd know enough not to believe him, and that upset *them*. And I told the world at large that our balance

sheet was as near fraudulent as it was safe to make it with auditors in their dotage and wall-eyed shareholders. And I told the managing director that the profits wouldn't have been so disgracefully inflated if he weren't paid a percentage on them. . . ."

"Who's the managing director?"

"Fellow called Wilmot."

"The man with the knife in the lonely lane?"

"Yes. And generally I behaved like a sweep and lost my temper and handed in my resignation. It was all true, but I'd no business to talk like that, and I've not yet finished being ashamed of myself." He sighed and looked out of the window. "And now back to Oxford and start all over again. It feels like being put back into knickerbockers and fed on bread and milk and sent to bed at six. I thought the Oxford phase was closed."

"You're not to smoke any more, it only makes you cough." His tobacco pouch was lying beside him on the seat and Sheila dexterously confiscated it. "You know, you're rather hard to please. The whole way back from Gib. you were grumbling because you hated the work you were doing and were ready to bite your own head off for giving up your Fellowship, and now that you've got the chance of going back you don't know if you want to take it."

"I do—I mean, I do want to take it."

"Very well, then, what's worrying you? Why did you ever give it up?"

"What does a research Fellowship lead to?"

"What do you want it to lead to?"

"There's no scope in Oxford . . ."

"What do you want scope for?"

For a moment Sheila fancied herself within measurable distance of understanding him: on board she had assiduously tried to discover what it was that made him restless and discontented with life, what were the unsatisfied ambitions that haunted him. To her, as to Daphne, he had replied with a smile that old men dreamed dreams and young men saw visions. Since her discovery of the tragic history connected with his grandfather she had expended on his account a sum of curiosity of which she frankly admitted he was unworthy. Such direct questioning, however, was little calculated to overcome his natural reserve.

"If you take this appointment, when do you start work?"

"At the beginning of the October term."

"And what will you do till then?"

"Oh, a hundred and one things. Dispose of the lease of my flat, sell my furniture, store my books, and say good-bye to London. Then I might go and live at some place like Fontainbleau and see if I can't finish the monumental work I've got on hand at present."

"But why leave London?"

"How long does it take for a pipe to empty a thousand-gallon tank when the pipe accommodates a hundred gallons a minute and the tank is only half full and there's nothing coming into it? I'll lend you a pencil and the back page of the *Westminster* if you can't do it in your head. I can't afford to live in London after throwing up the Anglo-Hibernian."

"You could make a living by conducting the female

portion of the aristocracy round London in the small hours of the morning, without the parents' knowledge. Daphne would let you give her as a reference."

She spoke lightly, but the news that he was leaving London threatened to throw her own schemes seriously out of gear and to bring back the Maurice problem in all its old intensity. Of course in his present mood the lot would fall to the highest bidder: if her grandfather and uncle made it worth his while, the lectureship would be declined; if their price were too low or their bidding too dilatory, Oxford would engulf him, and she would have to face the frustration of what she was beginning to regard as a perfect match. She blamed herself for not keeping her grandfather more attentive to her orders; ultimately, of course, he would find whatever she told him to find; she could truthfully promise Denys a more lucrative position than anything Oxford offered, but she was unwilling to let her own agency intrude for the purpose of fostering an intimacy which was shaping so favourably without her intervention. Till Monday morning she and the University of Oxford would dispute possession of the body, and as it lay with her to open the attack she lost no time in disparaging the lectureship by patronising praise of his half-formed decision.

"Seriously, I think you'd be wise to go back. . . I don't believe you've ever been happy since you resigned your Fellowship."

"Or for a long time before, that's the trouble. And I see no reason for thinking I shall be deliriously happy if I do go back."

"But what do you want?" she asked, with an

affectation of impatience. "You'll have leisure and comfort and a competence and the only kind of work you like. You can dream out your dreams and see your visions . . . ."

"No!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Then I can't help you."

"No one can help me."

Sheila prepared to try him with a fresh fly.

"I met a man the other night who knew you, a Regius Professor of something or other—Martineau, his name was. Did you know that you were one of the most brilliant of the coming school of historians? Nor did I, but he said so, and as he's a Regius Professor I suppose it must be true. He wanted to know what had happened to you and why you weren't going on with your work. I told him you were rather a dear, but that I didn't know what your books were or why you'd forsaken them, and wasn't particularly curious to find out. So he told me to read 'Social Decay in the Roman Empire,' and I promised to read it before I went to bed; and he told me it was in two fat, stodgy volumes, and there was a third to come, and I told him I'd wait till the third came, because I didn't like being interrupted when I was improving my mind. Oh! and he was rather sweet: he said my mind was incapable of improvement. You never say things like that."

"Because, in spite of everything, I hope it's not true."

"Obvious. That wasn't what he meant."

"I'll ask him; he's the man I'm going to stay with."

"Well, you haven't told me why the third volume isn't written yet."

Denys held out his hand for the tobacco pouch.

"It'll mean smoking cigarettes otherwise," he warned her, "and I'm forbidden to do that. Oh, I got tired of the Roman Empire and its social conditions. At least, no, I didn't get tired, but there was something unreal in spending my whole life over politics nearly two thousand years old—another race, another faith, another language, other prejudices and passions—when within sixty miles of Oxford another empire—the strangest in history—was being governed and misgoverned under my eyes by men of approximately my race and tongue and intellectual outlook. I didn't want to leave Oxford, but London seemed to be calling . . ."

His eyes had grown dreamy and his voice reflective.

Sheila waited, but his thoughts were far away and she had to bring him to earth.

"But you never thought of taking up politics as a profession?" she asked by way of prompting.

Denys shrank into himself at her voice, as though conscious that he was thinking aloud.

"Profession, no. Politics aren't a profession. . . ."

"Career, then."

"Nor even a career. They're a faith, a duty, a vision, a crusade, whatever you like to make them."

"Usually a bore," said Sheila indifferently. "I thought we'd agreed on that on board. You told me that no man of just mind would lower himself to the exaggeration, the false issues and appeals to prejudice which were inseparable from party politics. Your

words, not mine," she added ; " I could have expressed myself in half the number."

" I'm sure you could. Yet . . . I don't know. I tried to show you that politics could be made as thrilling as a melodrama and as romantic as a novel of Walter Scott's . . . in any country and at any time, provided you found a lost cause to champion."

To her delight Sheila found she had revived the atmosphere of their last evening together ; he had played within half a dozen bars of the place where before he had broken off ; with adroit handling and sympathetic suggestion he should be made to finish the movement.

" Except in England," she objected, " which is, after all, the place where we're most concerned to make politics interesting. You broke down rather badly there ; it was far-fetched, you were tired."

He looked closely at her, but her eyes were non-committal.

" It was all far-fetched, just an exercise of the imagination, yet somehow the idea of a man with an inherited sense of injustice warring eternally against a careless society which never understands his grievance and would imprison him if it did . . ." He paused and added conversationally : " The idea rather appealed to me. I see you don't agree, and I'm rather surprised, because underneath a veneer of civilisation we've most of us a secret craving for destruction. You see it in boys and you think they outgrow it, but they don't. We all of us feel a physical joy in going to a music hall and watching a burlesque juggler smashing crockery. It's quite inexplicable . . . And we've all

of us our childhood's passion for a Secret Society, we're all of us Nihilists in posse . . . That has been the backbone of the female suffrage movement; it's gratified the human love of secrecy and scheming, and it's stirred the blood with the sense of war and lust of demolition. Are you too old to desire to be an outlaw and plot the overthrow of society . . . ?"

"Aren't you?"

"Not too old to feel the romance of it."

"It taxes my imagination more than yours."

"How so?"

Sheila sat silent till she was sure of his fullest attention: then she looked him steadily in the eyes and spoke with deliberation.

"Because I've none of the Jacobite spirit. My grandfather and father never lost their lives in fighting an unfeeling government for the sake of some private ideal; we've still got all the property we ever had, and a good deal more besides; we've everything to lose and nothing to gain by even the smallest of small revolutions, and we've no grievance of any kind against society."

She paused invitingly, but Denys sat silent and impassive, wondering how far her words were innocent and how much she had guessed his secret. In another moment the last doubt was removed.

"So it isn't easy for me to share your point of view," she added with careful emphasis.

"Mine?" he exclaimed with an overt attempt to bring the discussion back to generalities.

"Isn't that your vision? Red, dripping vengeance —they were your own words."

"I was suggesting a point of view."

"Your own?"

"What do you think?"

"I'm waiting for you to deny it."

"Do I give the impression of being a revolutionary?"

"I don't know you well enough."

Denys forced a laugh. "Confide your suspicions to Sir William if you're not afraid of making yourself ridiculous. See what character he gives me."

"That's the strength of your position," said Sheila judicially. "The whole idea's so grotesque that no one would treat it seriously: if ever you found yourself in a position of power, people would refuse to be put on their guard."

"Though Sheila Farling rose from the dead to warn them. If your suspicions are so bizarre, is it quite fair to entertain them at my expense?"

"Can you say truthfully that you're in love and charity with your neighbour, that the whole Jacobite business was mere talk, that your father had no business to fight for the Boers against his own countrymen . . .?"

"That was his concern, and they were the English, not his fellow countrymen."

"Same thing."

"Oh, gods of my fathers!" Denys threw up his hands in despair. "It's that criminal error that lies at the root of all English misgovernment of Ireland! And I hear it from the lips of a girl whose name is Sheila, who was born in Ireland and talks as only an Irish girl can talk."

She was quite unmoved by his apostrophe and went on composedly:

"Can you say truthfully—I don't want to hurt your feelings—that your grandfather—well, had only himself to blame for what happened?"

"That again was his concern."

"I know. And there was great provocation, and the man he killed ought to have been killed; and your grandfather faced the consequences like a man and never tried to escape. But was it or was it not a just sentence?"

Denys shrugged his shoulders.

"The law forbids duelling and he killed a man in a duel. Have I swept away the Jacobite charge?"

"Quite," said Sheila ironically. "And a good deal more besides. You can take the Oxford appointment with a light heart."

"I don't see the connection."

"No? You gave up your Fellowship because you wanted to take up politics and . . . oh no, it wasn't a profession and it wasn't a career, it was a faith, a duty, a vision, a crusade— What a memory I've got, haven't I? You wouldn't soil your fingers with party politics in their present state. You told me so, didn't you?—and the only way you've so far suggested of giving dignity or romance to English politics is to annihilate the English for their past sins. And that you don't want to do, you've no reason for desiring to do, have you? You told me that, too. The lectureship has no rival in the field." She paused to enjoy his discomfiture, and then added: "That was an extraordinarily good summing-up; in my way I'm rather clever. And here's Riversley, just in time to keep you from appealing against the verdict."

Denys opened the door and helped her to collect her property. The train had reached Riversley half an hour too late for his peace of mind.

"You'll come and see us again before you finally leave town, won't you?" she said, shaking hands with him through the window. "And we'll be friends and I won't tease you."

"I don't mind it," he said with an uneasy smile.

"Oh yes, you do! You've simply hated this journey and hated me, poor little, rather attractive me, for turning you inside out, and you're only pretending not to be angry because you think your position's quite secure. So it is. You're so absurd that I must enjoy you by myself; you're far too good to share. I won't tell a soul what I've discovered."

"And what precisely is that?"

"The dream. It's been puzzling me for several weeks. As a dream it's no sillier than most, but of course if you make the mistake of mixing up dreams with reality, I shall have to take you in hand."

Waving him good-bye, she ran along the platform in pursuit of the tall figure of her grandfather. Maurice was pressed into her service as a beast of burden, so that both her hands were free for gesticulation when she came to explain to the collector that her ticket was lost and she had no intention of paying the price of another. The combat was of short duration and ended in the complete rout of the collector. As the train steamed out of the station Denys saw her standing in the middle of the road directing operations, while Maurice endeavoured under a fire of criticism

to unpack her dressing-case and discover a motor-veil. She was smiling with a contentment she had every right to feel. In the first place she had satisfied her curiosity on the subject of Denys, in the second she had scotched the Oxford lectureship. Before he had time to send in his acceptance, her grandfather would have to make a definite and better offer of employment in London. As she pretended to ridicule one article of faith after another and strove to make him deny their weight in his thoughts, she had seen his colour rising, and the fire gathering in his eyes. A modicum of opposition or disparagement was sufficient to bring him to boiling point, and the more she pressed the claims of Oxford, the greater his distaste for Oxford became. He would leap at any proposal that would keep him in London and bring him nearer the soul of politics.

With Oxford relegated to the background, her schemes for bringing him into touch with Daphne and disposing of Maurice took on their former favourable colours. In a sense she was playing with fire in compassing the union at the price of abetting Denys in his political ambitions, but the danger was remote. Daphne's fervid idealism could be trusted forever to dispel his dream, and if Daphne failed she could rely on herself to find some way of countering him. Without underestimating the adroitness of her own attack, it was clear that a man who allowed himself to be as completely riddled as Denys had been that afternoon, was an adversary not deserving of serious attention. As she tied the motor-veil in place and climbed into the car, she reflected that

even a railway journey may be turned to profitable account.

Denys travelled on to Oxford in considerable discomfort of mind, feeling like a guilty schoolboy who is uncertain whether the master has detected his guilt. Until his meeting with Sheila no one had troubled to connect him with a man of the same Christian and surname who had died fifty years before : he had never been asked so abruptly how he regarded his grandfather's memory and whether it had any influence on his own scheme of life, consequently he had never been obliged to palter with the truth or evade a direct answer. His whole existence, as he never ceased to remind himself, was one of duplicity, but the labour of supporting life was so far removed from the object to which his life was devoted that in Oxford or Fleet Street or the City he had never been oppressed with the sensation of occupying a false position. If Sheila had really plumbed his secret and, for all its improbability, was placing credence in it, the feeling of imposture would be harder to avoid.

For the present, however, he was passing out of Sheila's world and moving down to a level from which his goal seemed more than ever inaccessible. He would have to accept the lectureship and ought to be grateful for the chance that put another position at his disposal the moment he had vacated the last. But for what he conceived to be a religious duty, the prospect would have been enchanting : Oxford had twined her memories round his heart-strings, and as the well-remembered rickety hansom bore him through the narrow strets to Carfax, his mind went back to

the day when he entered into his kingdom with a freshman's eyes for the glories of the city.

Could he without fear of self-reproach start afresh, forgetting the cloud that pressed on his father's and grandfather's lives, oblivious of his own struggles and poverty and sacrifices, the world might yet concede to him the same measure of contentment as to others. He was reconciled to the loss of wealth and the shrinkage of position: neither was essential; all he asked of life was leisure to continue his work and explore further into the untrodden regions of the past. If, when he accepted the lectureship, he would have leisure . . . but tranquillity of mind would be wanting. He would feel as he had felt once before, that in sitting surrounded by his books, gazing into the flower-decked, sunlit quadrangle, he was deafening himself to the voice of a conscience that bade him go forth and avenge his grandfather's memory. And when that thought rapped at the door, his zest for work flitted tantalisingly out of the window.

Leaving his suit-case at the porter's lodge, he wandered back along the Broad, up the Corn and down the High. The new generation exhibited the same glossy heads and vivid socks as in his own day, an occasional Bullingdon tie was as conspicuously hideous as ever. Easter had fallen early, and Eights week was in progress: the same undergraduates seemed to be piloting the same sisters and mothers with the same dutiful reluctance. He turned down Oriel Street, with a sigh for the fruits of Rhodes' bequest to his college, across Merton Street and into the Meadows.

The Broad Walk was seething with spectators returning from the barges. An occasional don recognised and accosted him.

Strolling past the barges and round by the Humane Society's punt, he halted by the House ferry, roused a friend from slumber, and accepted an invitation to share and propel a stolen Canadian canoe. The friend was Jack Melbourne, son of an ex-colleague on the Anglo-Hibernian board. As Jack was supposed to be reading for Bar examinations in town it was inevitable that he should be found spending a protracted week-end in Oxford, and as races were in progress on the Isis it was equally inevitable that he should be found sleeping three hundred yards away up the Cher. It was Jack Melbourne's first rule in life to ascertain what was expected of him and then do something different.

"I hear you've chucked the City and are returning to this agreeable spot," he began lazily.

"I'm thinking of it," said Denys.

"Well, don't think too quickly, because I'm coming to stay with you in town next week. It's impossible to get any work done at home."

"I don't suppose you'll get much done with me."

"Possibly not, but I shan't have my father rushing in every five minutes to point the moral. Where are you dining to-night?"

"All Souls."

"And to-morrow?"

"I don't know."

"Well, come and dine with the Epicures. I'm stay-

ing with Bobby Harland, and as he's taking me he may as well take you too. No, I won't be thanked, it costs me literally nothing."

Denys paddled the boat as far as the rollers and and then returned overland to tea in New College. The enchantment of Oxford settled soothingly on his spirit and he made up his mind to accept the inevitable with a good grace. Dinner that night at All Souls completed the conquest: official Oxford was eager and unanimous in pressing him to take the lectureship. He had never appreciated how highly his work was regarded. Sitting at wine and smoking in Common Room, he listened delightedly to the tranquil, unhurried conversation that several years of stress in London had almost driven from his memory. The thought of breathing that atmosphere again and living once more within sight of the Bodleian made him glad that, whatever his ultimate intentions might be, for the present the lectureship was inevitable and without alternative.

The following night he dined with the Epicures. It was the revival of a pleasant memory which fitted itself together piece by piece in his mind: the dinner, the drive down the High on an overcrowded tram to the club rooms, the dessert and wine, and speeches and toasts and fines, the loving-cup and rich display of presentation plate. The news of the vacant lectureship had travelled apace, and the secretary offered a flattering welcome to the prospective incumbent. Denys replied, more toasts were proposed, more speeches delivered, more fines imposed on disorderly members, till at last the time came to stand up and

drink the healths of absent members. Then the party dispersed and Denys returned home.

The beauty of the city and the charm of its life had not belied his memory and expectations. Before going to bed he wrote a formal acceptance of the lectureship, and then undressed in the undersized bedroom and settled himself in the well-remembered narrow bed. The usual impassive scout called him in the morning, filled the usual inadequate hip-bath, and prepared the usual Gargantuan breakfast. On his plate were half a dozen letters, mostly forwarded from London: one had come direct. He opened it first and read with curiosity:

"MY DEAR DENYS" (it ran),

"Sheila tells me you are week-ending at New College, so I write to you there. I don't suppose you have had time to fix anything up since resigning your directorship of the Anglo-Hibernian, and I therefore want you to leave yourself a free hand till I have had time for a chat with you. Parkstone (my son-in-law, you know), the chairman of the Birth Rate Commission, wants a man with a ready pen to help him. The evidence is finished this week and they will proceed to consider their report. I am not at liberty to say—at any rate on paper—what lines the report will follow, but I have urged P. to go a little beyond the customary limits of such reports and bring forward proposals that will strike people's imaginations. As you know, I have always considered your future to be literary or political—certainly not commercial, though you were a tower

of strength to us on the A.-H. and I was sorry to lose you. P. has read some of your books and wants to meet you. This is not a 'blind-alley employment': I am so convinced that politics are your proper sphere that I am prepared to see you a good distance along the road. I cannot write more now, but shall be glad if you will let me know as soon as you return to town, so that we can meet and talk together. I return on Tuesday.

"Yours,

"WM. FARLING.

"Sheila sends—I think it was 'love,' but I'd better make it—'kind regards.'"

Denys turned back to the first page and read the letter a second time. Oxford was blotted out of his mind and his eyes only saw the words "political future," "I am prepared to see you a good distance along the road." Then the last paragraph attracted his attention and made him smile. Sheila sent him her love: no doubt she was still rejoicing over what she regarded as her victory in the train, perhaps wondering how he was facing the disappointment of being invalided from active service and sent to recruit his strength in Oxford. And while she rejoiced and sent flippant messages, her grandfather, all unknown to her, was offering to bring him in a moment leagues nearer his goal than he had been able to get in years of unaided striving.

The irony of such a postscript being added to such a letter pleased him. He smiled over it as he finished his breakfast, and was still smiling as he lit a pipe

and sat down to destroy his overnight acceptance, substitute a refusal, and tell Sir William that he would be back in London at midday on Monday and at his disposal when required.

CHAPTER V

HOW LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM SHOULD RUN

"Sir," said Denis, with the grandest possible air, "I believe I am to have some say in the matter of this marriage. . ."

"I am afraid . . . that you do not perfectly understand the choice I have to offer you. Follow me, I beseech you, to this window . . . . You observe there is an iron ring in the upper masonry, and reeved through that a very efficacious rope. Now, mark my words: if you should find your disinclination to my niece's person insurmountable, I shall have you hanged out of this window before sunrise. I shall only proceed to such an extremity with the greatest regret, you may believe me. For it is not at all your death that I desire, but my niece's establishment in life. At the same time, it must come to that if you prove obstinate . . . if you sprang from Charlemagne, you should not refuse the hand of a Malétroit with impunity—not if she had been as common as the Paris road—not if she were as hideous as the gargoyle over my door. . . It will be no great satisfaction to me to have your interesting relics kicking their heels in the breeze below my windows; but half a loaf is better than no bread. . ."

R. L. STEVENSON: "THE SIRE DE MALÉTROIT'S DOOR."

"IF I'm coming to pay an extended visit at Buckingham Gate, I wish you could see your way to looking my father up in my absence."

Denys and Melbourne were returning to town from Oxford, and the morning was sufficiently advanced for Jack to have overcome his constitutional early moroseness and to have grown conversational.

"If you'd like to adopt him, you may," he went on. "He has many good points, and I'm sure he'd like you as a son. He always grumbles at me for wasting my time and not settling down to the serious business of life; if he knew you'd chucked up a job in the City on Friday, taken another in Oxford on

Saturday, turned it down on Monday, and started yet another on Tuesday, he'd say: 'This young man means to get on.' Think it over; he'd appreciate you."

Old Mr. Melbourne's reiterated assertions that it was time for his son to earn his own living awakened no responsive chord in Jack's breast. For twenty-two years he had existed without toiling or spinning, and regarded himself as both too young and too attractive to alter his mode of life. Most men with his endowment of good looks started life with not more than an average amount of original sin and declined gracefully to ultimate damnation; Jack had been damned in a previous existence and made no effort to conceal the fact. Largely without morals and wholly without soul, he had brought an urbane and calculated selfishness to the level of a rare and exotic art. Men continued to invite him to their dinners because it gratified them to see his undisguised enjoyment of their wine, their oysters, and their cigars, and he never scrupled to accept an invitation and then not appear; women and angels wept for him because he was so lovable, so incorrigible, and so entirely regardless of their weeping. If he had been shipwrecked on a desert island with a single companion, and the companion had saved two loaves out of the wreckage, Jack would have stolen one and had the other given him. He was blessed with black hair, black eyes, very long eyelashes, and very white teeth; he did no work, took no exercise, never missed his three Turkish baths a week, and took his first meal of the day in bed at two o'clock in the afternoon.

The amplitude of his leisure and the perversity of his tastes might be measured by the fact that he habitually lit his pipe from paper spills of his own making.

After failing to secure a degree at Oxford, he had stood for a Fellowship at All Souls. It was never quite clear why he was not elected. Since coming to London he had discovered that a man who is still young and unmarried can find a sufficiency of mothers with daughters to keep him fed four times a day, supplied with cigars in the intervals of eating, kept *au courant* with all that was best in music-hall and theatre, housed in town, mounted in the country, and invigorated with the open air of Scotland throughout the autumn. He did not shoot, as it interfered with his luncheon, and he found it more restful to linger over the meal and allow the ladies of the party to wait on him. If there were any remonstrance he would point out that they were ten and he was one. It was a tribute to his personal charm that he was most loved by those whom he most chastened, and his mission in life was to galvanise the bones of the heartless, epigrammatic 'nineties: he had so far succeeded in reviving a semblance of their brutality without a spark of their brilliance.

"How long am I to have the honour of entertaining you?" asked Denys. "I hope you'll stay as long as you can, of course; but I don't know at present what form my new job will take, or even if it means my staying on in town."

"You are not to think of me for one moment," said Jack earnestly. "Busy man, Empire resting on frail,

bowed shoulders, and so forth. I shall understand. As long as I've a bed and a latch-key and regular meals and something to smoke I shall be happy. And you must take in the *Morning Post*, Denys; I'm not strong enough in the early afternoon to face *The Times*. As a matter of fact, a little while and I shall be with you, and again a little while and I shall not be with you. I'm spending next week with the Littletons."

"Not again!" exclaimed Denys in horror.

"But why not?" asked Jack with surprise.

The Littletons were neighbours of Lord Badstow's at Riversley, and consisted of a father who had been dismissed each morning to the decent obscurity of Mincing Lane until he had acquired a considerable fortune, a mother who aspired to move in what she described—with reverent use of capitals—as County Society, and a singularly unprepossessing and entirely unmarriageable daughter. The gods with fine irony had suffered Mrs. Littleton to blunder into the possession of a good cook and a husband with a creditable taste in cigars: that explained Jack's frequent acceptance of her hospitality. The curious plainness of the daughter Sibil accounted for the regularity of the invitations, and perhaps too for a quality of wine which neither host nor hostess appreciated.

"You're heading straight for the dock," said Denys warningly.

"Oh, I think not."

"Obtaining meals under false pretences."

"But there are no false pretences; it's the ordinary battle of wits and the old, old struggle for existence. We meet for what we can get out of each other: I've

scored a few indifferent meals out of Mrs. Littleton; she's got a blank card at present. She's trying to score a mésalliance out of me. We don't put on any disguises, just covering enough to hide our primitive nakedness. If she prosecutes for obtaining meals under false pretences, I shall prosecute for attempted abduction; and if either of us downed the other, it would mean the break-up of society: from a private vendetta we should be driven back to the barbarities of legal proceedings."

"Think of Sibil's innocent, girlish dreams."

"Sibil's dreams are directly traceable to over-eating. I've had the same sort of thing myself. Anyway, a man must live."

On their arrival at Paddington the two young men drove to Buckingham Gate. Jack then changed into suitable clothes for an afternoon at the club, Denys settled down to clear off odds and ends of correspondence and await Sir William's summons to Cleveland Row. By Wednesday morning the preliminaries were complete.

. . . . .

"When you've finished breakfast, Sheila, you might see if you can get hold of Denys on the telephone and say I want to see him as soon as possible." Sir William finished his tea and lit a cigarette. "I think I've fixed up everything with Herbert. It was a good idea; Denys is just the man for that report."

"That's like you, to take all the credit. Please remember that I suggested your trying to get Uncle Herbert to find him something to do. Ages ago I suggested it. just after you'd put your foot into it

on board, long before the row on the Anglo-Hibernian."

Sir William drew in the smoke of the cigarette and looked at his granddaughter with a smile.

"And ever since that day I've been trying to make out what devilry you were up to, Sheila."

"And you haven't found out, and you aren't likely to, unless I tell you. I will some day, when you've fixed up this secretary business."

Sheila was contentedly lingering over breakfast with her grandfather. The meal had not begun until eleven o'clock because it was a rooted belief in Sir William's mind that a hale and vigorous old age could only be secured by strong-willed resistance to all the seductions of early rising. As Sheila had been dancing till four o'clock she was not disposed to quarrel with her grandfather's conviction on this point, and the two of them presented a picture of unexpected domesticity as they sat in their respective armchairs sipping tea, munching toast, and throwing a leisurely eye over their morning's letters. The lateness and privacy of their breakfast had not led either to depart from an exalted standard in the matter of dress; Sir William wore a grey frock coat, white waistcoat, and patent leather boots, and if Sheila appeared in a tea-gown of grey mousseline de soie it was not because she found it less trouble to put on, but because it afforded an all too rare opportunity for displaying her unusually small wrists and white arms.

"He's accepted provisionally," said Sir William, "and Herbert is now only waiting to meet him and

form an opinion of his abilities, and I just want to tell him what's expected of him."

"What's he living on all this while?"

"Practical woman! I expect he goes to Herbert unpaid, but I'm undertaking to supply him with the sinews of war. I've got great faith in his powers and I'm backing him to the extent of eight hundred pounds a year for five years. If nothing comes of the report, we shall know the worst in six months' time, and for four and a half years he'll find himself provided for. If the report's a success his reputation will be made. I am to decide whether he's to stand for Parliament, and if he does, I shall pay his election expenses. That's our contract in outline."

"Well, look here." Sheila dropped a fresh slice of lemon into her tea. "You're not to work that boy too hard. He's delicate. See?"

Sir William smiled to himself as he had smiled on board in the early stages of the intimacy. It was like Sheila to hold a brief for anyone who was ill or unhappy, but her solicitude on Denys' behalf was something new.

"What are you smiling at, Father Time?" she asked.

"Only my own wicked thoughts, my dear. Now ring him up and see if he'll dine here to-night, and if not, say I'll come round to-morrow afternoon."

"We're dining out to-night: at least, we're meeting Uncle Herbert and Aunt Margaret and Daphne at the Carlton, and going on to the opera."

"Why are we forsaking the homely fireside, Sheila?"

"My dear, until we have a cook who's less eccentric than Servan, I can't take the responsibility of giving dinner parties at home."

"Well, never mind. See if Denys will join us at the Carlton. I suppose there'll be room for him in Herbert's box; if not he can have my place. My palate's not sufficiently vitiated to care much for English opera."

Sir William gathered up his letters and proceeded to his writing-table in the window. Though it was June the mornings were chilly, and Sheila had had a fire lit in the large, open grate. Before this she drew up the most spacious arm chair in the room and piled it shoulder-high with cushions: then taking the telephone from the mantelpiece she subsided gracefully into the cushions until a pair of small feet encased in grey silk stockings, two white arms struggling free from loose-hanging sleeves, and a little mischievous face surmounted by wave upon wave of soft, black hair, were the only portions of her body which remained visible. The telephone is to most people a more or less necessary nuisance, but a few gifted spirits can extract amusement out of anything, and Sheila Farling never raised the smallest of her small fingers unless there were some diversion to be won from the action. She settled down to a breezy and intimate morning's conversation, leaving her grandfather to deal with his letters as best he might, which meant, as usual, their speedy abandonment and a running commentary of gentle protest and remonstrance.

"Hallo, hallo. Is that Mr. Playfair? Oh, good morning! I say, I hope I haven't dragged you away

from breakfast or bed. Oh, all right, you needn't be so stuck-up about it; some of the best people don't breakfast till eleven. I was dancing till four. Well then, I suppose that means you didn't go to bed at all? What's the good of it? You don't give yourself a chance. Oh, never mind work, I do hate that damnable word. I *shall* say 'damnable' if I like, it's a very good, expressive word. You try. Go on. Oh, that was delicious, I didn't think you could say it. You speak just like a naughty schoolboy. Look here serious business, Denys. Oh, that made you jump, didn't it? Yes, it did, because I distinctly heard you jump, and it isn't polite to start contradicting a lady so early in the morning. Well, it's early for me, anyway. But regarding the jump, you did, you know; but Father Time and everybody calls you Denys, so I don't see why I shouldn't. Oh yes, you were bound to say that; you're a little obvious in the early morning, Denys. Besides, I don't think you're old enough to be called Mr. Playfair, you're almost an infant in arms still. Anyway, you're not fit to look after yourself. Keep quite quiet, please, Father Time No, that was meant for my grandfather. Look here, we're talking too much and losing sight of the main issue. Where are you dining to-night? Oh, good guess! but you might have waited to be invited. That's all nonsense, I want you to dine with us. Well you must lump the other party; we—want—you—to—dine—with—us—and—the—Grayling—crowd—at—the—Carlton—and—come—on—to—the—opera. Is that clear? Well, you must give the tickets to someone else and hire a man from a Labour Exchange to

take your place. Very well then, all I can say is that you're one of those animals that get possessed of devils and run down steep places into the sea. You know what I mean. No, swine's a horrid word, I only meant pigs, little pigs, little black pigs. What's the attraction, anyway? Oh yes, I knew that, but what's she like? Of course she's pretty, she always is; besides, I did give you credit for fairly good taste in looks, Denys, or I wouldn't have honoured you with your present degree of intimacy. Yes, but if you get the other end of the room I shan't see her. How old is she? O-o-oh! My dear boy, what possible amusement can you get out of taking a child of eleven to the theatre? You aren't really fond of small children, are you? Oh, but that's rather sweet of you; I didn't know you were so human. No, don't cut me off yet, please, I haven't half finished. Well, Denys—ah! you're getting used to it now, you hardly jumped at all that time: the point is that Father Time wants to talk to you and he's thinking of coming round to tea to-morrow. Shall I come too? Oh, that's a lot better; you warm up and get less obvious as the day goes on. Yes, it is a bit of a strain, isn't it? Well, what will you give us for tea? No, I simply loathe India. Well, then, you'll just have to make me some coffee, that's all. What's your flat like? Shall I like it? Oh, I daresay, but I want to know if you think I shall like it, I want to see if you take a proper pride in your surroundings. Hallo, somebody wants to see me, so you mustn't waste my morning any longer."

She turned to her grandfather and explained quite unnecessarily.

"He can't dine wi' us to-night because he's taking a child to the theatre, and she's only eleven and very pretty and her name's Margery; but he's expecting you to tea to-morrow and I'm coming too to see what his flat's like, and he's going to make coffee for me with his own fair hands, and he doesn't like to hear me use strong language and altogether he's rather a dear. Yes, James?" This to a footman.

"Mr. Weybrook has called to know if anyone is at home."

Sir William silently gathered up his papers and prepared for flight.

"Here, Father Time," expostulated his granddaughter, "play fair. I'll toss you who has to see Maurice."

"My dear, I'm not equal to Maurice at this hour of the morning."

"Well, what about me?"

"I think you'll be equal to almost anything, judging by your powers over the telephone—equal even to seeing that Maurice doesn't stay to lunch." He faded away through one door as Weybrook entered through the other. Sheila weighed the possibility of being able to make sport out of her visitor and decided that his air of dejection was promising.

"Well, Maurice," she began, "will you put the telephone back on the mantelpiece? Then we can consider why we are thus favoured. Smoking is permitted."

He obeyed her orders and sat down opposite her at one end of the club fender, balancing his hat on his knees and tapping the inside of his left boot with a short, gold-topped cane.

"You look comfortable, Sheila," he remarked.

"Yes, Maurice."

A pause.

"You're a rum kid."

"Yes, Maurice."

"Can't make you out. You just sit and bubble over. Never seem off colour."

"No, Maurice."

"Wish I knew how you managed it. Look here, Sheila, what's the matter with Daphne?"

"What wrong has she done in her lord's eyes, Maurice?"

"Oh, drop rottin'. I can't make her out."

"That's the second person you haven't been able to make out in the last two minutes. I'm afraid you're lacking in perception, Maurice."

"Dessay, but I'm only in the same boat as everyone else over Daphne. I can't think what's up with her. We used to get on swimmin'ly and now I don't seem able to do anything right. God! I've never spent such a week-end in my born days. I sometimes think she's sick of me."

"Impossible, Maurice!"

"Well, it looks like it."

"Have you asked her?"

"Yes, that's the devil of it. I put it to her, why was she mopin'? Was she sick of me? Did she want to bust up the engagement? Was it my fault? Had I gone downhill since we first fixed it up? What was it all about?"

"What did she say?"

"Said she wasn't mopin' and that I hadn't gone to

rot, but that she felt she was leadin' a pretty useless sort of life, and that she felt she'd been put into the world to do some good of some kind and was blest if she could see how she was justifyin' her existence. That was a week ago, and she's worse now."

"How?"

"Well, this week-end she says she's livin' with her head in a drain-pipe—not those words, of course—and knows nothin' of what goes on outside the four walls of Berkeley Square. She's started readin' some joker's 'Life and Labour in London' and wants to go and do social work. I put it to you, Sheila: what am I to do?"

"Why don't you read the same joker's 'Life and Labour in London' and go and do social work with her?"

"Think she'd like it?"

"I don't know. It would show you were trying to get up a sympathy for what interests her. You haven't done much in that direction yet awhile, Maurice!"

"Suppose not. Think I'd like it?"

"I'm sure you won't, but I think it will be very good for you."

"I dunno. Look here, what I want to know is, how's it goin' to end? If I do the heavy philanthropic with Daphne for six months and at the end of that time I'm laid out stiff, and she's still as keen as ever, things are worse than they are now. It'll look as if double harness was goin' to be a murky sort of business for us both."

"Well, don't meet your troubles half-way, Maurice.

Give it a six months' trial and then come back for a fresh dose of advice."

"I'm not proud, I'll give it a trial; but look here, Sheila, I wish you'd talk to Daphne yourself and see if you can get any change out of her."

"All right. Give me the telephone and I'll get her to come and see me. Now, Maurice, I shall have to turn you out, I've got a lot to do."

"You look it." He got up and rammed his hat on to the back of his head. "I say it again, Sheila, you're a rum kid."

"Thank you, Maurice."

"No rot about your bein' put into the world to do good to your fellow-man."

"You ungrateful pig! When I've wasted the best part of half an hour listening to your troubles and trying to find you a way out of your difficulties."

"No offence, Sheila. I mean no rot of Daphne's kind."

"No, my task is much harder. I hate seeing people unhappy, so I devote myself to pulling unfortunate youngsters out of the mire."

"Well, it's a good Christian work. So long, Sheila."

He ambled out of the room whistling to himself, and Sheila once more addressed herself to the telephone, this time to invite Lady Daphne to lunch with her. Sir William was bound for his son-in-law's house to offer suggestions for the lines on which the proposed report was to be drawn up, Sheila would be left to her own resources for many hours, and Daphne would only be in the way if she remained at home, so that everything pointed to the advisability of accepting her cousin's

invitation. At two o'clock, accordingly, Lady Daphne arrived, and as soon as luncheon was over both girls retired to the drawing-room and Sheila opened the campaign without further delay.

"Father Time's very full of mischief just now," she remarked, "and Uncle Herbert is being caught in his toils."

"What's happening?" asked Lady Daphne.

"They're hatching a scheme for bringing out a book on the results of the Birth Rate Commission and, according to Father Time, it's going to start a revolution and break up all the old political parties and make Uncle Herbert the shining light of a New Model Republic or something of the kind. Haven't you heard?"

"Not a word."

"Oh, well, it's only just been fixed up. Father Time has suborned a clever young friend of his to do the writing of the book; he only heard this morning that the said clever young friend was willing to lend his services to the cause. On closer investigation the chosen vessel turns out to be my friend Denys Playfair, your honorary-guide-to-London-in-the-small-hours."

"Oh, what fun! He's one of the most entertaining people to talk to that I've ever met." She relapsed into a thoughtful silence while Sheila marked with approval the sudden brightness that had come into her eyes at the mention of Denys.

"If you're looking out for an opportunity for social work, here you've got it. You'd better help Uncle Herbert and Denys with the report."

"Who told you about me looking out for social work, Sheila?" asked Lady Daphne in some surprise.

"Maurice. He's quite upset about you, my dear. Called here this morning to know why he was out of favour and what he'd better do to get back into your good graces. Also wanted to know why you'd been bitten with a desire for good works and how long would I give you to outgrow it."

"Oh, Maurice!" The brightness faded out of her eyes and Sheila did not fail to notice this change also. "What did you tell him, Sheila?"

"I told him to go and do likewise." She paused to enjoy the effect. "Maurice is going to show his mettle: he's going to prove how fond he is of you, and if you ask me how long I think he'll stand it, I should say about a fortnight."

"What made you do that, Sheila?" asked Daphne after an interval of reflection.

"I wanted to see if Maurice was as unadaptable as he sometimes seems to be. After all, my dear, if you're going to marry him, it's as well to find out if you've got any tastes in common. I think Maurice feels that. He knows his tastes: eating and drinking and smoking, polo, hunting and steeplechasing, the Gaiety and the Empire, Romano's and the Savoy Grill Room. He doesn't know your tastes and doesn't know whether you know. So I've told him to find out. For the next few weeks Maurice is going to slum with you. If you both like it, well and good: if you both get tired of it, well and good also. If he gets tired of it and you don't . . ." She left the sentence unfinished. "I told him to come back to me for a fresh dose of good advice."

Sheila made her statement sufficiently obscure to

give her cousin food for reflection. The two sat in silence for a while till it came into Daphne's mind that she had promised to call for her father and drive him to his club. Sheila accompanied her to the head of the stairs, hoping for some expression of opinion on the subject of her disposal of Maurice's activities for the remaining weeks of the season. None was forthcoming: Daphne merely put her arms round her cousin's neck and kissed her, with the words, "Dear old Sheila," and then ran down the stairs. Sheila was reduced to refusing tea, sitting at the piano in her drawing-room and playing somewhat dreamy waltzes until it was time to dress for dinner. Then, when her hair had been brushed and the major portion of her toilette was complete, she slipped on a green silk kimono and sat down in an armchair by her bedroom window to await her grandfather's return and his invariable visit to her bedroom on his way to dress.

She had only five minutes of enforced idleness before he knocked at the door, entered into possession of the sofa, and produced a cigarette case.

"Not to-night, Father Time," she said warningly. "I've just had my hair washed, and cigarette smoke doesn't go well with Eau de Portugal."

"You've got the makings of a tyrant in you, Sheila," grumbled the old man.

"A wonderful aptitude for getting my own way, that's all. I tell people it shows the strength of my character. Well, have you bought your slave?"

"Signed, sealed and delivered. I fixed up everything with Herbert and they start as soon as the evidence of the Commission has been circulated."

"Well, aren't you going to thank me for finding you the slave?"

"I'm waiting to be told the reason of this sudden incursion into politics."

"Well, I didn't see why I shouldn't have my share of fun out of it. Father Time, what do you think of Denys as a prospective grandson-in-law?"

"You might go a long way farther and fare a good deal worse. By the way, has he said anything on the subject?"

"Father Time!"

"Well, my dear, you asked my advice."

"But not about . . My dear, venerable friend, *do* you think I should be consulting you on such a subject?"

"Again, you might go farther and fare worse."

"That's pure vanity; you get much vainer as you grow older, Father Time."

"It's a gentlemanly failing, like avarice."

"That's neither here nor there, but for your future guidance I will inform you that I'm far too busy straightening out other people's matrimonial tangles to have time to make any for myself, and further, when I *do* take the plunge I shan't dream of allowing anybody to give me advice on the subject."

"That I rather imagined, my dear."

"Well, anyway, my point is: how would you like to see Denys as a grandson-in-law and the husband of Daphne? I think there's a good deal to be said for it."

"Her mother will find a good deal to say against it. You really are rather an imp, young woman. I

suppose all your plans have been laid with the idea of getting those two under the same roof for an indefinite period. As soon as Daphne's mother sees which way the wind is blowing she'll send him packing. I talked to her to-day on the subject of Maurice: from her conversation I was forced to add this to the list of marriages that are laid at the door of a mute, uncomplaining heaven."

"Well, I'm only concerned with marriages as they are made in this world."

"Practical woman! Incidentally, how are you disposing of Maurice?"

Sheila lay back in her chair and gave a little bubble of laughter.

"My dear, I've had such a day! First of all, in comes Maurice with a face a mile long and wants me to find out what's the matter with Daphne and why he's so much out of favour. He says she has become suddenly convinced of a serious purpose in life, and as a result she is all agog to cut short her present sinful, wasted existence and start in to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the sorrowful, and free those that are prisoners and captives. Not unnaturally Maurice is a little perplexed and doesn't know how to acquire merit under the new dispensation."

"Could you help him?"

"Yes, I told him to take up his cross and follow Daphne. It will do him good and show Daphne he's trying to meet her on the subject of her newborn enthusiasm. Father Time, if you leave fat finger-marks on my best silver-backed brushes, you won't be invited again."

Sir William replaced the brush with which he had been fidgeting. "Well?"

"Then came Daphne—and I had her version. It's quite true, she's got philanthropy in an acute form, so I encouraged her and tried to keep the fever unabated."

"Well?"

"That's all."

"For a woman, perhaps. Not for me. I want to know how Denys comes in, for instance."

"My dear, you must learn to draw conclusions. Daphne breaks out as a social worker of a rabid order, and at my advice Maurice follows suit to try and seem sympathetic and anxious to please her. Six months of the treatment leaves Daphne keener than ever and Maurice with his patience in tatters. He recognises that himself. Result: either they both realise that they're not cut out for each other or if Daphne persists in her present absurd frame of mind that she can't throw him over after once accepting him, I am backing Maurice to feel he can't marry the Daphne of the regeneration, and to make tracks for the other side of the world. If necessary I am going to help him by suggesting a few of the delights of bachelorhood, not forgetting to mention that a bachelor has no wife's social and philanthropic schemes to support."

"And all this while Daphne is going to have Denys as a counter-attraction?"

"That's the idea."

"And what if Denys doesn't take kindly to Daphne?" asked Sir William, who recognised the

possibility of having him as a grandson-in-law, but as the husband of another grand-daughter.

Sheila shrugged her shoulders.

"We must take our chance of that, but I don't think it likely, and anyway, the important thing is to knock into Daphne's head the recognition that Maurice is not worth having at any price whatever. I've had a pretty busy day, Father Time."

"So it seems. There's not much of Daphne's 'serious mission in life' about you, Sheila."

She rose from her chair and walked over to a mirror in order to fix a white rose in the side of her hair.

"What l ites you men are," was her tranquil comment. ' hat's just the remark Maurice made"

"Isn't there something in it?"

"No." She turned to him quite seriously. "My mission in life is to make people happy and show them what an astonishingly good place this world is. Daphne has the first call on my powers because she's my cousin and I'm very fond of her, and I've had her in hand for some time now. And Denys comes next because—oh, I don't know, because he's got a genius for making himself perfectly miserable, and a nice boy with a beautiful profile and magnificent eyes has no business to be perfectly miserable. As it happens it suits my plans to run my two cures concurrently."

"Killing two birds with one stone?"

"You're extraordinarily inept in some of your metaphors, Father Time."

CHAPTER VI

CLAY IN THE POTTER'S HANDS

" For I remember stopping by the way
To watch a Potter thumping his wet clay:
And with its all-obliterated Tongue
It murmur'd—' Gently Brother, gently, pray! "

. . . . . .

Ah love! could you and I with him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire! "

FITZGERALD: " OMAR KHAYYAM."

THE following afternoon Sir William and Sheila drove across St. James's Park to take tea with Denys in his flat in Buckingham Gate. They were informed on their arrival that he had just telephoned to say he might be a few minutes late and would his guests excuse his impoliteness and begin tea without him? The man who gave the message added that another gentleman of the name of Melbourne was waiting in the library. Sheila, as usual, assumed control of the situation and issued a breathless torrent of instructions.

" No, we won't start tea till Mr. Playfair comes, because he's promised to make coffee for me and I won't have it from anybody's hands but his; and I don't propose to sit doing nothing while you live on the fat of the land, Father Time. Which is the library, please? "

" The first door on the right, miss."

"Very well, then, don't you bother about us; we'll go and make friends with Mr. Melbourne and brighten him up till Mr. Playfair comes. That is not a bad hall, Father Time: he shows quite fair taste in his oak and his brasses."

The inspection concluded, she threw open the library door and stood still for a full minute to take in the effect of the room as a whole. Denys had chosen the flat for love of the library, and it was here that most of his time was spent. The room was more than thirty feet long, with three windows on the left side overlooking the park, and a large open fireplace surrounded by a club fender in the middle of the opposite wall. Every other inch of wall space was covered with carved oak book-cases standing five feet high and surmounted by a collection of valuable bronzes separated from each other at intervals of two yards by cut-glass bowls and vases of roses. The bottom shelves of the book-cases were fitted with locked glass doors through which could be seen choice examples of the binder's most consummate art. There was a double writing-table at each end of the room and in the middle a small, square, four-sided bookcase with a Rodin bust on top. Two capacious armchairs and a Chesterfield sofa upholstered in olive green morocco faced the fireplace, and in one of these, reading an evening paper and nursing a large blue Persian, sat Mr. Jack Melbourne. Sheila gave herself time to notice that he was good-looking, young, and healthy; from the negative evidence of empty plates she judged that he had been hungry or at least passably greedy, then she advanced with outstretched hand. Melbourne was so much en-

grossed in his paper that she was opposite his chair before he looked up to see a slight, pretty girl in grey, close-fitting dress and large black hat holding out a very small, white-gloved hand and speaking with a look of amusement in her big black eyes.

"Don't get up, Mr. Melbourne, please. Oh, I know it's considered more polite, but you should study the comfort of the cat instead of making a fetish of your manners. I'm Sheila Farling, this is my grandfather, Sir William Farling; you probably know him, most people seem to. We've come to have tea with Denys and as he isn't here I propose to go for a tour of inspection. Will you come?"

"I shall be delighted." Jack Melbourne removed the cat to a neighbouring chair, shook hands with both the newcomers, and awaited instructions.

"Are you coming, Father Time?" she asked, "or shall I give you something to read to keep you out of mischief?"

"I've been here before, Sheila. I shall sit and rest, if you'll find me something interesting. See if he's got any of the proof-sheets of his new book on that table." He dropped into an armchair and lit a cigarette while his granddaughter brought him a heavy bundle of proofs from the writing-table by the door. "This will keep me busy for the present," he remarked. "Now, Jack, I hold you responsible for Sheila's good behaviour, and though you may think it an honour now, when you've known her as long as I have, you'll appreciate why I'm white-haired."

"Seventy-three years of thoroughly unprincipled living! It's enough to make anyone's hair white.

came on the scene too late to save the body, but I still have hopes of the soul. Come along, Mr. Melbourne, or we shan't have time to get round before Denys comes back."

For a quarter of an hour Sheila enjoyed the luxury of unhindered exploration in strange territory and the privilege of uninterrupted commentary. She was growing interested in Denys. He had attracted her on board, and the attraction had by no means come to an end on the discovery of what she conceived to be the cloud that overhung his life and lent an air of mystery and distance to his personality. She had never been able to induce him to talk about himself, so that it had come as no small surprise to her to be told by a Regius Professor that she had been entertaining a genius unaware. He liked her, apparently, or he would not be at such pains to seek her out and talk to her: on the other hand, he talked as he would talk to a child, teasing and laughing at her, never treating her seriously or admitting her to his confidence. She was uncertain whether to be annoyed with him or to relax her present inquisitorial and domineering attitude with a view to winning his sympathy. Finally she decided that it would be time enough to determine how to behave towards him when he had condescended to put in an appearance. In the meantime Melbourne was waiting to do the honours of his flat.

She stood for a moment to admire the colour-scheme of the library, to inhale the fragrant scent of the great rose-bowls and to enjoy the atmosphere of orderly, warm, sunlit, soft-carpeted, large-cushioned luxury

which the room presented. Then she turned to inspect the contents of the bookcases, from time to time picking out a volume to make certain of its identity or discover the date of purchase : occasionally a book so chosen would be placed on one side for future borrowing instead of being returned to its shelf.

The library was large and of catholic choice, and as she moved slowly from case to case humming to herself or exchanging a word with Jack Melbourne she tried to diagnose the literary taste of its owner. There were rows upon rows of Latin and Greek texts, more than the most studious would normally acquire in an English public school ; histories of Europe in every age, with a preponderance in favour of modern England and nineteenth-century Ireland ; political economy in stout plenty ; political science in six languages ; monographs on every political question of the day, unbound Transactions of more than one abstruse and learned society, biographies by the score, and innumerable bulky political memoirs. The cases on the side of the library overlooking the park were given up to those standard works of English literature without which so many "gentlemen's libraries" continue still to exist : there were translations of German and Scandinavian dramas, and of countless Russian novels, French and Italian in the original tongues, and of modern Irish and English plays enough to fill many shelves. For the first time since she had known him, Sheila was conscious of a feeling of pitying regret that a man whose tastes were so purely literary, and whose instincts were all for comfort and

scholarly leisure, should allow himself to be led by a perverse and fantastic sense of duty to undertake work of which every moment must be uncongenial. Aloud she contented herself with remarking:

"The modern young bachelor knows how to do himself well. We shall have to speak to him about this, Father Time; a young man with his way to make in the world has no business to be spending money on this scale."

"Better not," said her grandfather gently.

"But why not?"

"He may feel it's rather more his business than yours."

"Yes, but when a young thing like Denys doesn't know how to look after himself—and they never do, you know—it's time someone took him in hand."

Sir William's was not the real reason, as both he and Sheila knew. Any reference to the way he lived sent a flush of anger over Denys' sensitive face: it was an imputation that the descendant of the oldest landowners in the King's County was unfitted on the score of poverty to surround himself with beautiful furniture or live in presentable rooms. As Sir William knew, the library was like a chapel to him: chairs and tables and book-cases had been bought one by one with the guineas earned in criticism and review articles; the Rodin bust was the fruit of his first novel, and at one time he had entered in a diary the date of each purchase and the character of the work that had enabled him to make it. And Sir William had been the first to enter the flat when the purchases were complete and the warehouse had yielded up

books which Denys had gone hungry to keep from selling. He knew, as no other man knew, the sensitiveness and insanity of Irish pride.

With a lingering, fascinated glance round the sun-lit room, Sheila strayed into the hall in search of fresh worlds to conquer. Jack, who was resolved that she should miss nothing, insisted on a visit to the bath-room in order to impress upon her that it was the only chamber of its kind in London, where one could be certain of securing hot and cold water, whiskey, cigarettes, and a morning and evening paper at any hour of the day or night. Then, making a judicious exception of the spare room which he was occupying at the present time to the destruction of the otherwise universal tidiness of the flat, he led the way after a cursory inspection of the dining-room to Denys' own bedroom.

Sheila entered with undisguised interest and lack of embarrassment. It was a fair-sized room furnished with great simplicity in old mahogany. The wall-paper was white; the curtains, counterpane, and carpet a deep purple. Sheila made exhaustive study of the brushes, combs, manicure-set, razors, powder-box, and other shaving sundries on the dressing-table, sniffed gingerly but with subsequent relief at a silver-topped scent-bottle, and looked at herself approvingly in the mirror. On a small table by the bedside stood a Japanese steel cigar-box, a Turkish coffee-pot, and a small ebony bookstand. She picked up the books to judge of his taste in night literature and discovered an "Imitation of Christ," Carlyle's French Revolution, Fitzgerald's Omar Khayyám, an India-paper Browning

which opened of its own accord at "Bishop Bloughram's Apology," the Book of Job with Blake's illustrations, Boswell's Johnson, four volumes of the "Decline and Fall," the Pickwick Papers, Morley's Life of Gladstone, Trevelyan's Life of Macaulay, the "Bab Ballads," Poe's "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque," and the "Ingoldsby Legends."

"A fine confusion," she remarked; "we'd better go back to the library. There's someone getting out of the lift."

They just had time to make good their retreat to the library when the door opened and Denys entered.

"Punctuality is still considered a form of politeness," began Sheila before he could apologise. "Father Time used to tell me that your manners were irreproachable, and here have we been waiting for twenty minutes with my grandfather indulging in cynical chuckles over your proof-sheets and Mr. Melbourne and me, disconsolate and bashful, sitting at opposite ends of the room and not daring to interchange a word until we'd been introduced."

"Anything up to the point of your sitting silent and bashful I'm prepared to believe. Not that, Sheila." Denys slowly pulled off his gloves and placed them inside the tall hat which he had just deposited on a table by the door. He had come in looking careworn and tired, but his eyes regained their lustre as they met Sheila's, and Sheila was pleased at the tribute. It was pleasant to feel virtue going out of her, and it gratified her to see that however tired or i. Denys might be looking, he never failed to respond to the

challenge of untroubled enjoyment which radiated about her.

"Ring the bell for tea, Denys, then set about making my coffee, and then tell me where you've been."

"I've been in the ring department of Mr. Aspinall's jewellery establishment in Bond Street," said Denys, taking a small copper coffee-pot out of a cupboard under the middle window.

"You don't mean to say . . ." began Sir William.

"Don't be absurd, Father Time," interrupted Sheila, though it took her a fraction of time to make certain of her ground; "did you ever see a man who looked less like it? He only wants to draw attention to himself. Tell us what you've really been doing and why you're late, and whether you enjoyed yourself last night, and how Margery looked—oh, and everything else that occurs to you."

"But I've told you. I nearly lost my ring this morning through this wasted little finger having shrunk, so this afternoon I had a piece taken out of the ring to prevent it happening again. I must have been pining away since I met you last week, Sheila."

"All the arts of the orator, you see, Miss Farling," observed Melbourne. "The moment he comes in he makes himself the centre of interest by pretending he's been lured on to the slippery slope of matrimony."

"It was a plain answer to a plain question," rejoined Denys.

"But very effective, none the less. I do it myself when necessary. On those rare and depressing occasions when I dine with my parents I try to

stimulate them by a reference to my possible nuptials. I say, 'Father, how would you like Emily Podge as a daughter-in-law?' And then panic sets in. My father, a most respectable man—ask Sir William if you don't believe me—gasps out 'Good God!' and subsides into the soup. My mother sobs and squeezes down a lump in her throat. My brother, who's a barrister, barks out that I must insist on a settlement. My married sister remarks to the world at large that the men of the Melbourne family were never lacking in blind, uncalculating courage. My young sister heads a flank attack by expressing sympathy with Emily. By that time the conversational ball has been started, and with any luck the fish has made its appearance."

Sir William put down the proof-sheets he had been reading and looked at his watch.

"Denys, you'd better leave those two children to sparkle to each other and come over here as soon as you have made tea. I've got to go in a few minutes and I want to have a chat with you first."

With all the speed he could summon to his aid, Denys distributed the tea, made coffee for Sheila, poured out a large bowl of milk for the cat, acted as arbitrator in a dispute between Melbourne, who asserted he had had no tea, and Sheila, who asserted he had had too much, and finally drew up a chair next to Sir William. Their conversation was confined to the subject of the report, the date when Denys was to start work, the controversial areas he would be wise in avoiding, the limits of irrelevance he would do well

to observe. Denys was impressed with Sir William's intimate and detached knowledge of politics, the fruit of sixty years' patient observation of men and programmes rather than of the ten years he had actually spent in the House.

It was a comfort to Denys that they avoided getting to any closer grips with the subject. With Sheila in the room possibly overhearing their conversation, there was something unexpectedly embarrassing in the perfect confidence which her grandfather imposed in him. The years of their friendship had been years of unwearying kindness from the older to the younger man : it was easy to speak of a duty which transcended ordinary passions and conventional friendships, but the nearer he approached the goal, the harder his task became. Sir William had chosen him for the work because he seemed the ablest man available : that the proposal had ever been made arose from the old man's misgivings for the future. He deplored the apathy and disorder of the Conservative party as much as he feared the rising demands and increasing consolidation of Labour : it was to safeguard the future and protect his property for Sheila's enjoyment that he was employing the services of a paid fighter. And Denys' function was to draw his pay and fire into the ranks of his own army, to foster the apathy of the Conservatives and the consolidation of Labour until he was ready to desert and lead a united host to plunder the city he had been set to defend.

After ten minutes' conversation Sir William looked at his watch, rose from his chair and shook his host by the hand.

"Come along, Sheila," he said, "or I shall be late for my man."

At the bookcase by the door his flight was intercepted.

"You've got to wait five minutes, Father Time," she explained, "till I've chosen the books Denys is going to lend me."

"My dear, I'm late as it is. You must choose the books another day."

She proceeded with her task of selection, unmoved by her grandfather's words.

"If you think I'm going to be hurried, or that my wishes are going to be subordinated to yours—well, you've still got an enormous lot to learn about me." She picked out a volume of Maeterlinck's plays. "I would suggest . . ." then some essays by Max Beerbohm . . . "that you drive down to the club . . ." then a copy of Denys' own first novel . . . "and send the car back for me. Mr. Melbourne wants to be dropped in Pall Mall, so you may as well be useful as well as ornamental. Meantime I shall stay and talk to Denys."

"My dear, Denys is up to his eyes in work, he doesn't want any more of his time wasted."

"As if that mattered! It isn't a question of what Denys wants, it's a question of what I propose to do. Now run along, Father Time, and don't be unnecessarily late."

Sir William shook his head sadly, and with a smile of commiseration for Denys took Melbourne by the arm and walked to the door of his flat.

"Now I can talk," said Sheila as the door closed.

"It will be a pleasant change for you," said Denys with a smile. "Have a cigarette?"

"No, thank you, and please don't interrupt. First of all, are we friends?"

"I hope so."

"Honest? Why are you staring at me like that? It isn't polite."

"I was thinking."

"What about?"

"I was thinking how extraordinarily pretty you were looking."

"You overwhelm me!"

"I'm sorry." Denys spoke with annoyance: the tribute had been wrung from him and he had spoken to himself more than to her.

"There, there! And you said we were friends. You *have* got a dreadful temper. Look here, have you forgiven and forgotten all I said in the train the other day?"

"Forgotten, no: there was nothing to forgive."

"Nothing to rankle?"

"No."

"And you didn't take the lectureship at Oxford?"

"No."

"And you're thinking of taking up politics as a . . . ?"

"As a what?"

"I'm waiting for you to fill in the word. How *would* you take up politics?"

Denys flicked the ash from his cigarette and looked straight into her eyes. "As a faith, a duty, a vision, and a crusade."

"Ah!" Sheila picked up a paper-knife and balanced it on her knee. "Wasn't it rather a relief to get that out? You looked dreadfully uncomfortable talking to Father Time. And how does one start?"

"One awaits one's instructions from one's principal."

"Oh yes, that's what the world sees, but the world doesn't know what's at the back of Denys' mind. Only Denys and Sheila know that!"

"Does Sheila?"

"We'll assume she does, for the sake of argument. How does Denys propose to do his duty and realise his vision and live up to his faith and carry out his crusade?"

"Isn't it rather a large assumption?"

"Perhaps." Sheila recognised that in his present mood he was not disposed to gratify her curiosity. "Poor Denys," she said in a final attempt, "you've never learned how to tell lies. You'll find it a handicap in the crusade: the moment anyone asks you a question you'll blurt out the truth."

"You've found that?"

Sheila laughed indulgently.

"Sweet creature! It might be twelve by the air of mystery it tries to wrap round itself. Denys, you're looking most awfully ill. I usually see you by artificial light: with the sun on you, you look perfectly ghastly."

"I bet I don't look as bad as I feel: however, we shall never be able to decide that point. If you hear of any serviceable new lungs looking for employment you might let me know. I've almost done with mine."

"I suppose that's why you smoke without a break from the time you get up to the time you go to bed."

"Yes, I'm spreading a deposit of nicotine over the faulty places."

Sheila's voice softened and lost its bantering tone.

"Why don't you take proper care of yourself? for your own sake. Good heavens! don't imagine I care what happens to you," she added with exaggerated indifference. "But life's a poor thing for a man if his wife's a widow, and crusades are a little unsubstantial if there are no crusaders. Why don't you take a rest?"

"Just when the crusade you assume is supposed to be starting? When a solicitor has no case to go to a jury, he usually goes to the solicitor on the other side and says, 'Let's compromise.' On your own assumption the crusade is looking rather bright just now. I'm honoured by your interest in my health, but obviously I can't afford a rest at the moment."

Sheila sighed, to cover her annoyance at having her concern for his health misconstrued.

"Well, I must be going," she remarked. "Will you do me a favour?"

"If it's something quite unimportant and easy."

"Denys, when I take the trouble to call on you in person . . ."

"In a most becoming grey dress and black hat."

"Oh, you dear! I'm so glad you like them. Anyway, it's this."

She walked up to the mantelpiece, climbed on to the leather cushion of the fender, and lifted down a small old-fashioned oil painting of a young man's head.

The face was thin and close-lipped, with the skin drawn tightly over the bones of the jaw and cheek: the eyes had been fixed on the painter in an expression of reproach, and from whatever aspect the portrait was surveyed, the eyes still seemed wistfully and hauntingly to be meeting the gaze of the intruder. As she wandered round the library, Sheila had noticed and disliked this peculiarity: few people could boast of more untroubled nerves, but she felt any long time spent in the presence of that portrait would be disconcerting. She had no doubt that Denys came under the spell whenever he entered the room, and she considered the influence unwholesome.

"And what are you going to do with it when you've got it down?" asked Denys with an amused interest.

"Put it in a drawer or anywhere where it won't always be looking at you. I don't like always being watched, it makes me jumpy. And this picture's always watching you."

"I know: that's a portrait of my grandfather. We're supposed to be rather alike; Sir William's often commented on it. I wonder he never recognised that as the man he used to know at Trinity College."

"There's a very strong likeness, and when you're looking three parts dead and wholly insane as you're doing now, you've got just the same expression in your eyes. Denys, do listen to reason. This is 1913, your respected grandfather died fifty years ago; and all this business about martyrdom in a righteous cause and your carrying on the war in his memory—well, bunkum's the only word to describe it. I'm sorry

Denys, I know it's very bad taste to talk like this, but you do ask for it, you know. May I?"

She was still standing on the fender with the picture in her arms. Denys hesitated for a moment and then relieved her of her burden.

"By all means," he said, "let me help you down."

"Good! To be quite candid, I didn't think you'd let me."

Denys bowed ironically.

"You asked so nicely."

"It *is* hard to refuse me anything, isn't it? Father Time finds that."

"Also, I didn't want it for the moment. Have you heard that I'm going to stay with your uncle in Devonshire next week, to help him produce a report that is going to catch the votes of all our hungry and discontented democratic groups? Do you know that your grandfather is anxious to send me into Parliament and pay all my expenses?"

"Yes, you seem rather pleased about it." She was nettled by his accents of triumph, piqued to see that at present she had won no ascendancy over him. It would have been more gratifying if he had been converted outright to her view of the absurdity of his crusade: she would have liked a little more gratitude when she expressed concern for his health. As it was, Denys seemed to be boasting of his ability to get on without her and in spite of her. As she picked up the parcel of books and walked with him to the door she turned to ask with a smile of singular sweetness:

"Did my grandfather tell you that I had suggested your going to Uncle Herbert? No? Isn't that like

a man? You're all of you the same, you sit on the wheel and get whirled round and round, and the faster the wheel turns the giddier you get, until you actually think *you're* turning the wheel. Good-bye, Denys; get rid of that cough before our next meeting."

"When and where will that be?"

"At Philippi. I don't know when."

He accompanied her downstairs and put her safely into the car. The flat on his return seemed unwontedly dark and lonely.

CHAPTER VII

"THE TRUSTEES OF POSTERITY"

"Yea, I know this well: were you once sealed mine,
Mine in the blood's beat, mine in the breath,
Mixed into me as honey in wine,
Not time that sayeth and gainsayeth
Nor all strong things had severed us then
Not wrath of gods, nor wisdom of men,
Nor all things earthly, nor all divine,
Nor joy nor sorrow, nor life nor death."

SWINBURNE: "THE TRIUMPH OF TIME."

"SO you've not taken wing yet, Lady Daphne?" said Denys as they walked up and down the broad-flagged terrace at Parkstone Manor.

"Oh no! Not now. This is what I wanted, what I've been waiting for. Just for once in my life I'm going to feel that I'm justifying my existence."

"You're going to help me?"

"Will you let me? I don't know what I can do . . . I mean I'm rather a useless sort of person but it's only sharpening pencils and pinning papers together, that would be something. I should feel I had a share in the work," she added with a dimpling smile.

"You're going to do much more than that. You're going to read every page as it's written—aloud because it's got to be such nervous, heady, breathless stuff that you can't keep it to yourself. Every word is to be a reproach to you that you have lived complacently all these years while disease, injustice, misery clamoured at your gates . . . Your blood is to boil with indig-

nation. When it ceases to do that, when the words fail to grip you, when you find yourself doubting, questioning, inquiring, lagging behind instead of being swept along blindly, helplessly, on the top of an irresistible wave . . ." his voice lost its silvery ring and became conversationally matter-of-fact, "then we shall know there's something wanting, something to be re-written. And you're to be the judge."

"But I . . ."

"Yes, you can. You are the only one that can, you're the only one with faith . . . I'll give you the ideas and the inspiration but you must give me the realization."

"But I simply can't!"

Denys laughed at her open-eyed perplexity.

"I wonder when you'll appreciate your power . . . I wonder how you've gone all this time crushing yourself and crying for opportunities of great work when there's a fire burning within you . . ."

"But I can't use it."

"You can help using it; you use it unconsciously, other people use it. I defy a man to spend an hour in your company without feeling the pitiful meanness of his own spirit and wanting to make himself ever so little worthier of you."

She flushed with pleasure, then said lightly:

"I wonder if Maurice feels that."

"He will," said Denys thoughtfully.

He had arrived at the little wayside station late that afternoon and motored up the winding, heavily-timbered drive to find Daphne awaiting him at the hall door with a smile of welcome and the announcement

that he would have to put up with her sole company for some hours, as her parents were dining out with friends at a distance. Under her guidance he had explored the famous gardens of the manor and wandered through the silent, majestic rooms of a house which had been built out of the débris and the wealth of a monastery at the Dissolution. In time it would pass to her, with a fortune large enough to pay for its destruction and rebuilding every second year: she meanwhile would probably be living in one of the three houses which Maurice Weybrook stood to inherit on his uncle, Lord Badstow's, death. Denys thought of the grey stone castle in Ireland which his father had sold to provide funds for the United Irish and wondered whether the slim, brown-eyed girl at his side would ever appreciate the goodly heritage in which her lot had been cast.

At dinner they had picked up their intimacy where it had been dropped at four o'clock in the morning on a doorstep in Berkeley Square. Daphne had changed in spirit since their last meeting: the look of wistfulness had gone out of her eyes; the slow, dimpling smile was seen more frequently. He gathered that she had acted on his advice and obtained her father's sanction for a course of social investigation in the East-end: her mother, it appeared, had been puzzled but unexpectedly yielding, and any objections to the scheme of solitary exploration had been brushed aside when Maurice Weybrook with good-natured resignation offered his services as escort. Her mind was very full of the work which lay before them, though she preferred throughout dinner to draw Denys out on

the subject of his varied life. It was not until they had finished their coffee on the terrace and seated themselves in the pond-garden, so that he might smoke his cigar out of the wind, that she returned to the subject that was responsible for his presence in Devonshire.

"I don't feel you're as enthusiastic as you ought to be; you take it for granted too much, instead of feeling like one of the children of Israel in sight of the Promised Land after forty years' wandering in the wilderness. Doesn't it seem worth it now, Mr. Playfair, all the work and the sacrifice and the hunger?" His account of the years that had passed since he resigned his Fellowship had evidently touched her imagination. "I've got the feeling that now, for the first time in my life, I'm going to be of some use to the world. It was rather depressing at first. I remembered what you said about the 'cost of civilisation,' and it seemed so impossible to do anything . . . anything adequate. Then I heard that you were coming to help father with his report, and I felt that if I could do my duty just for a few months—pay just a trifle of my debt—it wouldn't be so hard afterwards—whatever I might have to do."

For a few moments they sat in silence, thinking what the next few weeks meant for each of them. For Daphne it was to be an achievement, something definitely accomplished in a good cause before she settled down to a lifetime of hollow unreality, a memory to brighten, and perhaps to disturb, the eternity of existence with Maurice Weybrook. For Denys it was the crowning opportunity which was to

compensate him for all his hardships, the stripping for that contest with the possessory classes to which two generations of Playfairs had already been sacrificed; in a sense it was also a private race with ill-health, an endurance test which was to show whether he could reach the tape before the ultimate and inevitable collapse. Yet as he smoked on in silence, his first enthusiasm grew damp and chill. It had been easy enough to keep his resentment glowing as he travelled down from London; he had quite convinced himself of an insuperable antagonism to the pleasant, kindly, and rather stupid people who invited him to their houses, offered him their shooting, and insisted on his presence at their balls and dinners. It was somehow different when he was alone with Daphne, receiving her whole-hearted goodwill and assistance in his labours. The admiration which he had won from her and the influence which he exercised over her had been obtained on false pretences. It suddenly came to him as an unbearable thought that he should take advantage of her confidence and turn her unselfish humanity to serve his vengeful and destructive ends.

"You mustn't expect anything very great out of this report, Lady Daphne," he warned her at last.

"But I do. That's why I haven't run away. I compounded with my conscience because I thought the report was going to be——" she hesitated for a word.

"A short cut to Utopia? It isn't intended to be that. It's a promissory note which we hope we shan't have to meet, a bill we shall be able to renew on easy terms, at all events. I give you your grandfather's views of it without comment, Lady Daphne. He

wants the report used as a programme for a new Tory Democracy, because the party has no programme of its own; he wants your father to stand sponsor for it because the party has no leader, and he wants me to write it because he thinks I've got the necessary Grub Street facility with a pen, and also—well, he thinks I might turn my attention to the House of Commons."

"And why are you doing it?" she asked gravely.

"Do you know a story called 'The Man who would be King'? I want power, I want to organise the democracy and lead it . . ."

"But that's what we're all trying to do, even poor little me. I want to help them in some way, to make them happier, and more secure, better fed, better housed——"

"I shouldn't care if a murrain carried off every man of them," broke in Denys bitterly, "when I've used them and squeezed their votes out of them. I'm playing for my own hand, and any assistance you give will be given to me for purposes of which you know nothing, not to the democracy that you want to elevate."

She paused before replying.

"You don't want me to believe that; there are so many people who take up politics for what they can get out of them. I thought you were different . . . With your power of doing good, too. I've been reading your articles on 'Industrial Death' . . ."

"They imposed on quite a number of people," said Denys with sombre relish,

"But you were in earnest, you must have been; you wrote as if you felt every word of it to be true,

as if a solemn sense of duty was forcing you to take up arms against all that suffering. Now I feel I've come into the wrong camp. You've no idea what a burden a conscience can be," she said with a rueful laugh.

"I fancy I know it too well." His hand wandered along the stone seat on which they were sitting, until it met an electric switch. He pressed it and in a moment the pond-garden was lit up with tiny lights. The rugged Triton seemed to spring into life under a cascade of white, bubbling water, and for a moment he watched the effect with pleased surprise before plunging the garden once more in darkness.

"That was symbolical, Lady Daphne," he remarked, "the disconcerting light which a woman with ideals sheds on the dark counsels of men. It makes it much harder to carry on my scheming if I know you're disapproving the whole time, or if it's going to turn you out of doors to seek salvation in ways untrodden by sinful men. That's why I turned the light off."

"That's why I'm going to turn it on again," she said with a laugh. "We want all the light we can get. And now we'd better go back to the house. I can hear the car coming up the drive."

The following morning Denys started work on the voluminous evidence which the Commission had accumulated, and for a week his time was occupied with marking and copying the passages which appeared most relevant for his own scheme. The original idea of a minority report had been abandoned, and to the bald and frigid compromise on which the majority of

the Commissioners had found tardy agreement, Lord Parkstone was prepared to affix his signature. At Sir William's suggestion he had now decided on the publication, simultaneously with the appearance of the Blue Book, of an unofficial manifesto embodying the reflections to which the evidence had given rise. Denys invented the title of "The Trustees of Posterity," and after a week spent in blue-pencilling the opinions of most of the witnesses, the skeleton outline of the book had been sketched, its principal divisions marked out, and its chapters named and headed with appropriate quotations.

Of the chief reasons for a stationary birth-rate little was said. The tendency was not traceable among the wealthiest classes; it was due to increased love of material comfort and a consequent deliberate limitation of families in the middle classes. In the ranks of labour there was not so much a fall in the birth-rate as an inverse ratio between the numbers and the quality of the new lives. Children continued to be born into the world in an unbroken stream, but this went on side by side with an emigration movement which carried the healthiest and most independent stock across the seas, leaving the relatively less robust to be the parents of the coming generation. In the introduction to his book Denys took these tendencies for granted and offered no recommendations: it was impossible to suggest to the middle classes any inducement to increase the size of their families and intensify the parents' struggle for existence, impossible to prevail on the enterprising and adventurous spirits among the working-classes to turn their gaze from the

rich promise of Canada and Australia in order to compete in the crowded, inelastic markets of an older civilisation. "The Trustees of Posterity" confined itself to the rate of birth among the labourers who remained behind: its recommendations were directed to securing for these the maximum of health, efficiency, and happiness.

Lord Parkstone read the draft of the first chapter with an interested eye, and approved the self-imposed limitation of scope. "It's going to cost a pretty penny," was his comment, a criticism later to be taken up and repeated in accents of increasing apprehension.

"There's no lack of money in the country," rejoined Denys.

"True enough, but sermons from that text are not too well received by my party."

"It's the only text that will get you a hearing from Labour," said Denys.

Apart from the question of cost there was little disagreement between the two men on the main lines of the book, though the older man had sometimes to be dragged into timid acquiescence. Denys devoted an ironical early chapter to the "Blessings of Inheritance," in which he painted a haunting and disturbing picture of transmitted scourges and congenital taints of insanity, disease, and criminality. It was an eloquent plea for hygienic breeding and the sterilisation of the unfit which afterwards delighted the hearts of the Eugenic Society. At the moment Lord Parkstone shook his head and read on. "Housing and Sanitation" was less controversial, in so far as the ground was more familiar; he was forced to admit that infant

life was heavily handicapped so long as it was crowded into costly, airless, lightless hovels; the only question was whether the party which embraced the majority of the landlord class would consent to the radical demolition and reconstruction on which Denys insisted. In the same way, "The Just Reward of Maternity" advocated a policy which had already found acceptance: the act of bringing a new life into the world was already regarded as a service for which the mother had a right to demand recognition from the State. The recommendations put forward by Denys only enlarged on a familiar theme.

Any real divergence of opinion was reserved for the concluding chapters: "The Security of the Worker" and "The Worker at Play." Denys had skated over thin ice in the matter of "Drink" and "Wages," and Lord Parkstone had raised no protest because he felt that the two subjects would be talked out if the book ever had its desired effect of fusing the Tory and Labour parties. It was a different question when he was called upon to bless untried proposals for the regulation of industrial disputes. He held the old unscientific and disorderly view that disagreements between masters and men must be left to adjust themselves on crude principles of bargaining and threats, superseded in the last instance by arbitration, a lock-out, and a sympathetic strike. Denys had acted as special correspondent at the time of a four weeks' coal strike in South Wales: he had seen the faces of the workers thinning day by day at the pinch of hunger, and the new-born babies, baptised an hour after birth, being carried out in tiny coffins before

their mothers were strong enough to walk in melancholy procession to the bleak hillside cemetery. Later in his career he had watched the dropping returns of new business at the Anglo-Hibernian whenever a labour war had been declared.

"A settlement is always reached ultimately," he told Lord Parkstone. "You reach it now by force, after a trial of strength which may cripple the resources of both armies for a generation. Why not settle it by arbitration? Why should the whole community be held to ransom and driven to the brink of starvation, when it has the power of enforcing its judgment on masters and men, by confiscating the mines and factories and rolling-stock of the capitalists, the trade-union funds of the workers, if they will not accept its ruling? When men have been made voters, it is a relapse into barbarism to make these trials of strength."

"I agree," said Lord Parkstone; "but should Parliament be called upon to fix wages, and would the workers on the spot—mines or mills or factories—feel they had had a fair hearing at Westminster?"

"Not under the present electoral laws," said Denys, taking up his pen for an attack on anomalies of registration and a stirring appeal on behalf of proportional representation.

"The Worker at Play" aroused fresh misgivings. Denys was firmly convinced that scientific specialisation and rigid division of labour had produced a heart-breaking monotony which was more potent in impelling manual labourers to a strike than any question of wages or prices or conditions. The one

good which resulted from a strike—provided it were not too long sustained—was a complete mental and physical relaxation; he sometimes felt that labour unrest would be a forgotten nightmare if every worker were given a fortnight's holiday in the year on full pay. The controversial chapter advocated a scale of hours to which Lord Parkstone said the manufacturers of his party would never consent. It was finally agreed to leave the point in abeyance till Sir William paid his promised visit to Devonshire and could sit as arbitrator.

The skeleton draft occupied Denys for a week. He hoped that another five weeks would elapse before the official report made its appearance, and until the arrival of Sir William and the disinterment of the controversial subjects, he was at liberty to clothe the naked bones with all the whipcord muscle and firm, clean flesh which an unrivalled vocabulary and exuberant imagination could evolve. They were days of great contentment. He rode and bathed with Lady Daphne before breakfast, wrote all the morning, played tennis or walked in the garden till tea-time, and then wrote again till it was time to dress for dinner. In the evening he sat on the terrace outside the open drawing-room windows, thinking over the next day's chapter, marshalling his facts and coining a mint of incisive phrases. Inside, Daphne would sit at the piano. She has guessed from an unfinished sentence he had once spoken that it soothed and helped him to listen to her playing: the only regret she felt at the time was her inability to do more for the work they were producing. When she had gone

to bed, he would retire to the smoking-room and astonish Lord Parkstone with the daring originality and fearless logic of his opinions on politics and sociology.

Even Lady Parkstone unbent and assumed the outward garb of humanity in presence of Denys. She was so certain that her daughter would ultimately marry Weybrook, and looked forward so confidently to the publication of the engagement on Daphne's twenty-first birthday, in November, that she never dreamed Denys could offer any counter-attraction. The hours they spent together riding, swimming, and walking, the long mornings through which they sat with touching heads and hands, bent over proof-sheets, the evenings when Daphne lingered at the piano with her eyes fixed on Denys' thoughtful face, all passed smoothly by her without awakening any of the apprehensions which were so frequent before Maurice declared himself. Denys, for his part, made himself both useful and conducive. As a conversationalist he was invaluable for her dinner-parties: he always knew where she had left her embroidery and could walk unerringly to the shelf in the library which contained the book of her desire. She regarded him as an able and obliging young man, both creditable and useful to have about the house. Sir William had guaranteed his social respectability by informing her that the Playfairs were a power in the land before the Farlings emerged from their original obscurity. It was careless of them to have allowed themselves to have become impoverished, but for once that did not matter. Denys was being useful to her husband, Daphne seemed to

like him, and there was now fortunately no opening for an indiscretion.

Neither Lady Parkstone nor her husband nor Daphne noticed the change which overcame Denys as the weeks went by. It was not until the last sheets of proof had arrived for correction, not until Sir William and Maurice had come to swell the last week-end party before the Parkstones went north, that the continuous strain of his unremitting labours began to make itself apparent. Maurice, to whom the symptoms were familiar, took him aside in the smoking-room on the night of his arrival.

"Look here, old son," he began, "you're simply ridin' for a fall. We must turn you out to grass and feed you up a bit or you'll be all to pieces. Hold out your hand: now look at mine. Mark you, I'm not supposed to be particular steady-livin', but if my hand shook like that, I should expect to be seein' things before the week was out. Turn it down, young feller my lad, before it turns you down. I know what a wearin' business this philanthropy touch is. I tried it with Daphne. Ask her."

"It's the last lap, Maurice," said Denys. "I shall have finished in a day or two and then I can sleep on till the last trump—or try to," he added.

"Sleepin' badly?"

"Not particularly well, Maurice, I never do." It was an understatement which the night watchman at the Manor could have corrected. There were few nights on which he did not see Denys retiring to his bathroom to sit with his feet in almost boiling water

in the hopes of drawing the blood from his aching head and inducing sleep: and there were few mornings on which Denys, hollow-eyed and coughing, did not ask his permission to be admitted to the terraces and the garden as soon as it was light.

"Any more faintin' fits?" pursued Maurice.

"You're getting a most awful bedside manner," said Denys with a laugh. "I shan't tell you."

"That means you have, or you'd have been slippy enough to deny it. Drop rottin', Denys. If you don't chuck this business and have a rest . . ."

"Well?"

"I shall have to turn Sheila on to you. She won't stand any truck from you or anybody else." He lowered his voice confidentially. "She's the only person her ladyship, my future mother-in-law, stands in fear of. And that's sayin' a good deal. Not half a bad kid, either; only she's too fond of getting her own way. Now you toddle off to bed, old Spot, and sleep on my good advice."

The following day Sir William sat in judgment on the disputed questions of policy which had arisen between his son-in-law and Denys. Without exception he decided against Lord Parkstone and in favour of the bolder programme.

"The cost of it!" repeated Lord Parkstone in his slow, immovable fashion. "I shall never get the party to vote all this out of their pockets. Flesh and blood wouldn't stand it."

"Then you must find a way of making omelettes that doesn't entail breaking eggs. Or else you must resign yourself to be out of power for the rest of

your days. Of course it costs money. That's the price you are paying for purchase of the Labour programme, for the privilege of carrying out their proposals in your way instead of letting them carry out their own proposals in their own way. You speak as if the money were being poured into the gutter, Herbert. I regard it as a premium which you are paying to insure against total destruction. It's not an unreasonable figure."

Backed by Sir William's support, the final chapter was finished two days later. Denys scribbled the time and date on the last sheet and laid down his pen with a sigh of great weariness. The earlier chapters were already set up; in a few days he would revise the remaining proof-sheets, and on the morning when the Blue Book made its appearance, every bookstall and library would be laden with copies of "The Trustees of Posterity." It would bear Lord Parkstone's influential name with suitable acknowledgment to himself; it would be cheap in price, boldly printed, and filled with those cartoon diagrams from which a nation unversed in statistics takes its sociological nourishment. At the moment there was literally nothing more to do. He leant his head on his hands and closed his eyes.

The sun had gone down when he awoke to find Lady Daphne standing in a black silk evening dress at his side, turning over the pages of manuscript on the table before him.

"Sorry, Mr. Playfair," she said, smiling. "I'm afraid I woke you up by crackling the paper."

"Don't say it's dinner-time," said Denys in accents

of horror. He was sitting in white flannel trousers and shirt open at the throat, with rolled-up sleeves. The watch on his wrist reassured him. "Oh, I see it's only seven; you've dressed early, Lady Daphne. Here, take this chair."

"Don't get up, please. I'm going in a minute, and meanwhile I shall accommodate myself on the table. Sheila ought to be up in a few minutes, so I thought I'd dress first and then go and talk to her. Well, it's finished."

"The prologue is."

"What do you mean by the prologue?"

"Until I know what the play is going to be, I can't answer that. The play depends on your grandfather: he is going to decide on the strength of this book whether he thinks me worth running as a parliamentary candidate."

"He's decided already. He says the book far exceeds his wildest hopes. When he gets back to town he is going to insist on the first suitable seat being offered you. What are you going to do when you get there?"

"I told you the first night I was here: I am looking for power, and the thought of it has kept me alive when—oh, well, I don't suppose I had to put up with any very great hardships, but they seemed great at the time. I want power, and when I've got it I want to fight for my own hand in my own way. It's as much a duty to me as anything you have ever felt tugging inside you."

"You must forget it."

"Why should I?"

She gave a gentle shrug of her white shoulders and looked away out of the window.

"I don't think you realise yourself," she said at last, "you don't appreciate your power, the way you force people to agree with you and do what you want. You don't know what you've put into this book of yours: it's . . . . it's wonderful. It's the finest thing you've ever done; you ought to be proud of it and the good it's going to do. And instead of that . . . You know, to me it sounds perfectly diabolical. I can't believe you really mean it. It would be so awful."

Denys found the steady gaze of her brown eyes disconcerting.

"You're asking me to give up an idea that has become almost a religion to me, Lady Daphne. What do you put in its place?"

"The real, sincere spirit behind those words you've written. If they meant anything to you, I should want nothing more. They must mean something to you, you *must* believe in them."

"I tell you what I told you that other night: if a murrain carried off every soul to whom that book is addressed, I should be none the less happy. What you don't appreciate is that I never wrote that book. I'm proud of the penmanship, all that's best in me has gone into it, and I'm proud to be associated with it. But the fire, the poetry, the humanity—all that came from you when you sat at the piano, or talked about it, or told me I was getting apathetic or inhuman. It's your book: that troublesome conscience of yours has made it what it is. For good or for evil," he added.

"For good." She laid her hand appealingly on his. "It's probably the only thing I shall ever ask you to do. You've got the whole world before you, you can do what you like with your life. A girl can't, you know. That's why I wanted the satisfaction of helping you in some way, so that I might feel I'd made the most of my opportunity, in case it was the only one. It is my only one; I've had my day's holiday."

Denys was touched by the melancholy of her tone and all it implied.

> "Oh, what a drear, dark close to my poor day!
> How could that red sun drop in that black cloud?
> Ah, Pippa; morning's rule is moved away,
> Dispensed with, never more to be allowed!
> Day's turn is over, now arrives the night's."

Daphne smiled and took up the quotation.

> "Now, one thing I should like to really know:
> How near I ever might approach all these
> I only fancied being, this long day:
> —Approach, I mean, so as to touch them, so
> As to . . . in some way . . . move them—if you please,
> Do good or evil to them some slight way."

Denys sat with his eyes fixed on the manuscript before him. "Very near indeed," he murmured.

"But far enough to miss altogether. Won't you —won't you do yourself justice? It would be so wonderful to think I'd really influenced you. Otherwise . . . we just meet and part, and I go back to my dreadful, wasted life."

"Will you?"

"How can I help it?"

"But your life had altered—to some extent—

between the time I first met you and the time I came down here."

"That can't go on."

Denys made no attempt to contradict her; the truth was self-evident: the energy of Maurice's onslaught on the cruelties and sufferings of civilisation had already spent itself.

"I should be sorry to think tha.," he murmured, "very sorry."

"But why? I'm resigned to it."

"I hope not: resignation means the soul is dying."

"Perhaps. What else is possible?"

Against his will and despite his struggles Denys was being forced into an impossible position. To sit idly by and allow a sensitive, soulful visionary like Daphne to forget her dreams and sacrifice her ideals in order to marry the man of her promise, was to make himself accessory to a moral suicide; to influence her against Maurice was an act of treachery to a friend who regarded him with pathetic, dog-like devotion.

"I cannot advise you," he said.

"You're the only person who can." Denys looked up quickly, but Daphne was gazing out of the window, forgetful of everything, following out her own line of thought. "I'd made up my mind to it. I didn't think I should be happy; but then I don't know that we're meant to be happy. It was when you talked to me and seemed to understand what I was trying to express . . . I'd never thought I mattered before, but you made me seem important, something that counted . . . You told me I could inspire people . . .

No one's ever said that to me before, no one's ever made me take a pride in myself. And I've never dared talk to anyone as I've talked to you—they'd have laughed at me. If there's anything in me to lose, anything worth saving, you know—you ought to say."

"I'm not an impartial judge; you must get someone else to advise you."

"There's no one. Father wouldn't understand; I don't think even Sheila would. Granddad would, but he's not an impartial judge either . . ."

"You're the only person to decide, you're the only one that knows your own feelings, likings, affections . . . all that makes for your own happiness."

"But it isn't a question of feelings, it's a question of causing a great deal of pain. And it isn't a question of happiness, it's a question of duty."

The perplexity and despair in her voice drove Denys from the position of neutrality he had taken up.

"But happiness is a duty, the first and highest duty in a life which may be the only life you know. Don't I know that? Don't I know the misery of neglecting that duty? Nothing in the world should drive a woman, or a man either, Daphne, for that matter, to marry someone that they know beforehand will make them unhappy all their lives."

Lady Daphne did not answer. She was looking over Denys' shoulder to the far end of the library, where Lady Parkstone and Sheila stood framed in the open doorway. Her mother made no comment: she was too busily engaged in digesting the last fragment of the conversation, the familiar use of the christian name,

and the sight of her daughter sitting on the table hand-in-hand with Denys. Sheila, with a view of saving or enriching the situation, remarked sunnily:

"*Now*, Denys, it's time you went and dressed for dinner."

CHAPTER VIII

DENYS HAS NO TIME TO BE ROMANTIC

"'Stay, stay with us,—rest, thou art weary and worn!'
And fain was their war-broken soldier to stay;—
But sorrow return'd with the dawning of morn,
And the voice in my dreaming ear melted away."
CAMPBELL: "THE SOLDIER'S DREAM."

"ARE you going to stay with the Parkstones in Scotland?" Sheila asked Denys the second morning after her arrival in Devonshire.

"No, I'm going back to town to-morrow. Your grandfather is going to make life a joy for the Central Office till they've found me a seat."

"Have you been *invited* to go north?"

"No."

"I thought not. My young friend, you've not made bad use of your time up to the present; but are you going to carry it through?"

"In what way?"

"With Daphne."

"Lady Daphne is engaged to Maurice."

"Not so much of the 'Lady,' please. It's affectation; you don't use it when you talk to her and tell her only to marry where her heart is, and other admirable copy-book sentiments. Why don't you strike while the iron's hot?"

"Oh, many reasons, one of them being that I don't care to lay hands on other people's property."

"Property!" She spoke with concentrated scorn. "That is just the way a man likes to look on women. If ever I heard myself described as someone's property . . ."

"You won't, Sheila. The Married Women's Property Act will be revised to admit of your including a husband in your list of chattels: he won't be allowed to call even his soul his own. However, we're getting away from the main point. There's all the difference in the world between telling Daphne only to marry where her heart is and asking her to marry me."

"The one clears the way for the other."

"There's still Maurice, who is a great friend of mine, and it's not good form to steal a friend's fiancée any more than to steal his wife."

"If Daphne broke it off with Maurice . . ."

"There would still be a number of minor objections. To begin with, my income is chiefly derived from your grandfather's allowance of £800 a year—for five years—and an occasional insignificant cheque from my publishers. To that we may add £400 a year if and when I am elected to the House of Commons. A dainty dish to set before a daughter of the Earl, or rather Countess of Parkstone, Sheila. Next point, I have no grounds for thinking Daphne cares two pins for me, and finally I don't at all know . . ."

He broke off to try and determine what his feelings towards Daphne really were. There was compassion, reverence, admiration, a distant awe, but so far no love.

"Oh yes, you do," said Sheila quietly, "you know exactly what she means to you. You wouldn't have forgotten your political crusade so quickly otherwise."

"I didn't know I had," said Denys. It was the thought of the crusade that had saved him that evening until Lady Parkstone's unexpected entry put him out of danger of committing himself.

"Then you aren't taking the crusade seriously," said Sheila, with an air of finality. "If you wanted to head a revolution against people like poor Uncle Herbert, you couldn't do it in a way more upsetting to him than by marrying his cherished only daughter. Have it which way you like: either you think so little of your crusade that you won't take the first opportunity of striking just where you'll hurt most, or else you think so much of Daphne that you know she'll probably knock the nonsense out of you, and in any case you're not prepared to sacrifice her. If that's the case, don't tell me you 'finally don't at all know. . . .' You must pull yourself together, Denys; for 'one of the most brilliant of the rising school of historians' you incline to be muddle-headed."

Denys lay back in lazy enjoyment of the morning sunshine. "If you're really concerned for my welfare," he said, "you'll pick me that rose; I can't reach it."

"I sometimes despair of you men," said Sheila, disregarding his request. "I shall take to keeping rabbits, they're just as rational and far less troublesome."

"And they eat whatever green stuff you bring them. That's their chief recommendation in your eyes, Sheila."

"Well, I should only give them what was good for them. What are you waiting for? Is Daphne to throw her arms round your neck? Can't you see in her eyes . . ."

"I can see that she's still engaged to Maurice. As long as that continues I stand outside the picture."

"And when she breaks it off?"

"If she breaks it off—well, then I may try and find out whether I . . ."

"Whether you love her. Yes, you'll probably come to me and ask my opinion. 'Please, Sheila, do I love Daphne?' I may be old-fashioned, but I should have thought you would have known that for yourself. Anyway, if you don't love her, you shouldn't sit and hold her hand in the library. Remember Maurice! Or if you want to sit and hold her hand you shouldn't do it under the nose of Aunt Margaret and half the house-party."

Denys filled his pipe and searched through his pockets for a match.

"I feel very sorry for Daphne," he remarked reflectively.

"Is that going to carry you beyond the point of sitting hand-in-hand with her and gazing into her eyes?"

"Not as long as she's engaged to Maurice."

"But I'm going to break that off. I've got nearly three months till November, and that ought to be ample time. I should prefer you to save me the trouble, but if you won't, I must."

"I'm afraid you won't find it easy."

"Afraid? Ah, you know, your faculty for giving yourself away amounts almost to genius."

Denys laughed at the insult. "I used the word because I didn't like to think how hard you'd have to work to achieve nothing."

"The splash you make falling in is only equalled by the splash you make climbing out."

"Well, what do you want me to say? I admit straight away that it's a lamentably unsuitable engagement, only I don't think you'll find Daphne breaking it off."

"I found that out two days ago. You'll catch up if you persevere. But it takes two to make a match. . ."

"It only took one in this case," said Denys, with his thoughts dwelling on the forceful personality of Lady Parkstone.

"It's only going to take one to break it off," said Sheila, with an upward throw of her determined little chin.

"Not Daphne."

"There's still Maurice."

"Maurice!" Denys burst out laughing. "If you want to rob the Bank of England, there's nothing like going to the governor for the keys."

Sheila disliked being laughed at in her rare moments of seriousness.

"You'll have caught up that idea in a few weeks' time," she remarked disdainfully. "We'll meet in town and discuss it. And you can tell me if you're feeling any less muddle-headed."

Denys got up and faced in the direction of the house.

"If the gods have ordained that either Maurice or

I am to marry Daphne, I should prefer it to be Maurice. We're both equally unworthy to unlatch her shoe, but I don't think Maurice is as conscious of his unworthiness as I am of mine."

"Quite nicely phrased," said Sheila, turning to accompany him, and instantly mollified by a complimentary reference to her cousin. "With all your faults I'm glad to see you do at least appreciate her."

The next day Denys returned to town immediately after breakfast. His parting with his host had been cordial; Lady Parkstone's valediction had conveyed an idea of suspicion tempered by a certain frigid relief. Lady Daphne had remarked conventionally: "Hope to see you again soon." Sir William was bound for the Central Office, and had promised to meet Denys at his club and report progress over a confidential dinner; so Denys, after calling at his flat for letters, strolled into Pall Mall to see what congenial spirits had been spared to London in the inauspicious opening weeks of September.

The smoking-room presented a scene of unexpected animation. As a rule it was divided into two rival camps, with one delighted group surrounding Sir William's chair by the window overlooking St. James's Square, the other drawn up in a semicircle at the opposite end, listening to the pearls of great price which dropped from Jack Melbourne's lips. Between the two groups lay the fireplace and writing-tables, a neutral territory offensively termed the "Home for Lost Dogs," and peopled with the Club Bore, the Club Dyspeptic, and the assorted Club Nondescripts who dined in the house each night because they were too

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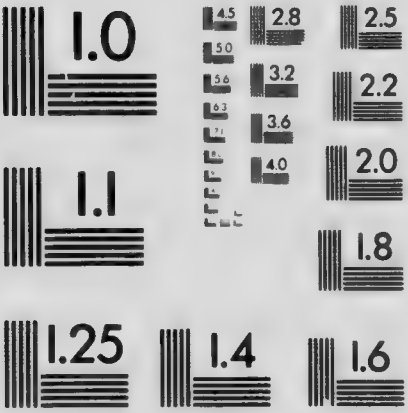

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dull to be invited elsewhere and too law-abiding to commit any breach of the rules which would lead to their expulsion. Sir William, eternally smoking cigarettes, favoured his audience with a running commentary on men and women of the day, couched in the most defamatory language: the Lost Dogs described their stomachs with graphic realism; Jack Melbourne, soulless, immaculate, and button-holed, discoursed of himself. Occasionally the two groups amalgamated for the purpose of a public debate between the two captains, but, at the moment when Denys entered the room, Sir William's chair was unoccupied, and many of his most regular henchmen were paying temporary allegiance to the other leader. After a few words of greeting from various members who had not seen him for a couple of months, Denys crossed to a vacant seat beside Jack Melbourne.

"I haven't seen you for months," he began, "though I ran across your father this afternoon."

"Not in anything heavy?" asked Jack hopefully. "Oh, I see, figuratively speaking. You should be more careful, you've put me in a flutter."

"I asked him if I should see you here to-night, but he thought you were dining with the Fortescues."

"They thought so, too," said Melbourne complacently. "They're probably still thinking so. It is only by not dining with people like the Fortescues that one can hope to stamp one's personality upon them. Where have you been hiding yourself all this time?"

"I've been down in Devonshire. Don't tell me that you've been working in town all through August?"

"I won't; it wouldn't even be true. I was

belched forth from some hospitable Scotch mansion in time to catch the mail last night, and I got to Euston this morning. After a satisfactory breakfast, I wandered down to the Temple and took lunch off one of those earnest young barristers who come to Chambers three times a week throughout the Long Vacation in the hopes of snatching someone else's brief or intimidating a nervous and infirm attorney. I then watched my father into the Automobile Club and touched him for a whiskey and a real cigar with a band on it. Then I came on here. At the same time, I have been working very hard since I saw you last."

"What at?" asked Denys doubtfully.

Jack dropped naturally into the honorific plural.

"We tried the Bar of England, and decided the Bar of England was not a white man's job. Then at our father's suggestion we dressed the part and tried the City. Cheaping-centre of the world, potent deity of insurance, bank-rate, short bills, backwardation, contango—which you will be surprised to learn is neither a South American dance nor a sub-tropical fruit. We tried them all—at least, when I say all, we spent a few weeks at the hospitable board of the Anglo-Hibernian. Now, that *was* a soft option—while it lasted," he added regretfully. "You just signed things and drew fees, but no sooner could I talk about 'prospects of life at age fifty' and 'average mortality' and 'suicide clause barred,' than the golden dream was dispelled. We've got you to thank for that, Denys; you frightened them into thinking they were unsound. So they were, of course; but after Sir William resigned there was a gem of a share-

holders' meeting. Our father retired from the board and took us with him. We were sorry to go; it was just as we were leaving finger-prints on the pure, passive face of Finance. Again we have to thank you for that."

"You can't blame me if one lunatic on a board persuades a working majority of other lunatics to bring the company within measurable distance of bankruptcy. You must blame our red-headed friend."

"We bear no malice," said Jack suavely, "we extracted amusement even from our red-headed friend, the egregious Wilmot. We returned good for evil, Denys; we worked on your behalf."

Denys shuddered. "Let me hear the worst."

Jack addressed himself to his audience collectively.

"Our friend Denys suffers from an embarrassing popularity; everyone admires his good looks, his subtle and comprehensive brain; he accumulates friends wherever he goes, their number becomes a nuisance and an obsession. I have been thinning them for him." He rang the bell for fresh stimulus to oratory. "After the shareholders' meeting, and while a committee was sitting to investigate and report on the misdeeds of the directors, we moved for the production of the minutes of that meeting at which you told the shy, bashful Wilmot exactly what you thought of him. You were in a minority then, the board is with you now; we nearly drew up a petition praying you to come back. Little as Wilmot may have loved you before, he loves you less now. There was a moment when his love for *me* hid itself behind a cloud, but I

made the amende honorable. For I have need of Wilmot."

"You're the first man that had."

"I have need of even the meanest, provided they live at Riversley and are on the register. Listen. Wilmot has taken a summer cottage at Riversley, so I bade Mrs. Littleton invite me for the week-end and bestow pasteboards on Wilmot."

"If you continue to visit at Riversley you'll infallibly end by marrying Sibil. I used to warn you for your own sake: now I warn you for Sibil's sake."

The interruption threw him out of his stride and checked the languid but incisive drawl.

"Don't be so needlessly rude, Denys; you're forgetting Wilmot of the Flaming Locks. I've just thrown Wilmot to the wolves."

"Do you mean to say . . . "

"Why don't you read your *Morning Post*? You miss all the fashionable engagements."

"The Eugenic Society will forbid the banns."

"The Humanitarian League has publicly thanked me for saving mankind from Sibil and womankind from Wilmot."

"Well"—Denys lit a cigarette—"one good thing is that you'll get no more free dinners at Riversley."

"Don't you think it, my boy! I was a bit nervous the first night when the Pol Roger 1904 didn't appear, but there was no mistake about the '87 Dow, and I hear now that the Pol Roger is finished. We're starting the 1900 Perrier Jouet, a bit heavy but good enough for the friend of the family. I'm the Friend of the Family now, Denys."

"But why? You've got out of a discreditable business and a dull family with tolerable adroitness. Why not leave them to moulder?"

Jack held his tumbler up to the light with an air of profound melancholy, as though the bubbles rising and bursting had some personal significance.

"We told you we had retired from the City: we have now abruptly recollected a Stake in the Country and a Duty to Society. We spend our spare moments collecting allies. We're going to stand for the Riversley division when old Collison retires. We've had property there for generations, and we're nursing the constituency. 'Nursing the constituency!' We wish our father could hear us say that."

"In which interest do you stand?"

"We are not sure. You must ask our father, he seems to be making all the arrangements. Hallo, here's Sir William looking for you."

Denys escaped the later passages of Melbourne's recital and followed Sir William downstairs to the coffee-room. In the course of dinner he inquired what progress had been made at the Central Office.

"It's not as good as I could wish," said the old man "but such as it is you're welcome to it. There's only one seat likely to be vacant that they know of, and that's the Riversley division of Oxfordshire. Collison certainly won't fight another general election, and he'll probably retire from the House in the course of the next few weeks. If you want to be nominated you can be. It's a fickle seat that has changed hands four times in the last six elections. If you fight it you can work old Badstow's influence for all it's worth and make

Master Weybrook canvass for you. I should be inclined to say 'Fight it.' Even if you're beaten it will do no harm, and they'll give you a safe seat next time."

"I agree with you," said Denys, "I don't want to lose any time." That day, without warning or explanation, he had fainted in his library: it was the third time such a thing had happened since the day when he went down to Devonshire, and the following morning he was due for an exhaustive examination at the hands of Doctor Gaisford. "By the way, do you know who's opposing me?"

"I haven't heard yet."

"Jack Melbourne; so he says, but I don't know whether to believe him. He doesn't yet know in which interest he's standing, and refers me to his father on the subject."

"His father is a crusted Radical of the pre-Reform-Bill period. Two ideas, both of them wrong, illuminated by two quotations, both of them misquoted. You needn't be frightened of Jack as a candidate."

"He says he's been nursing the constituency," said Denys thoughtfully, wondering exactly how much to believe of the story he had heard. There would be enough public opposition to overcome without importing private animus. Riversley was too uncertain a constituency to enable him to concede even Wilmot to an adversary.

"You'll have to work, of course," said Sir William, sipping his sherry. "Even Collison sits by only a small majority. But I've great faith in the book, it'll make a big sensation when it appears. Politics were

never more barren than at the present time; it's the golden moment for a man of personality or a man of ideas. You've got both. And you've got friends who'll work their hardest to get you in."

Denys sat silent, wishing that the conversation could be turned from politics. It had been hard enough in Devonshire to allow Daphne to pour forth all the generous enthusiasm of her nature on his behalf. In a sense he had warned her, any idea that he shared her passion for humanity had been shattered: but the warning was ambiguously offered and incredulously received; she could not conceive the perversity and malevolence of his purpose. To accept Sir William's assistance and good wishes was even harder: he had never been warned, and there were tangible, bright coins lying at Denys' bank that had been placed there by the man he was deceiving and attempting ultimately to ruin. It was a relief to talk with Sheila and be snubbed by her; his secret became less onerous. From time to time he had wondered [illegible] he had thought fit not to communicate it. It was [illegible] that such a story, promptly denied by him, would gain her more ridicule than credence, but he was fully alive to the difficulty of giving such a denial, and she recognised his difficulty as much as he did.

Conversation only became tolerable when Sir William turned from Denys' future to his own past. Till the end of dinner they discussed the men and methods of the Fourth Party, each somewhat agreeably surprised at the other's range of knowledge. At the conclusion of dessert Denys felt a heavy hand laid on his shoulder, and heard a deep voice addressing him by name. He

turned, to find himself looking up into the face of Martineau, Sheila's Regius Professor, his old tutor at Oxford and the recipient of degrees in every University in Europe.

"Eve dining with the Serpent," he said, looking at Sir William. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Playfair? Why did you leave us? Why didn't you come back when we asked you? Why do you let an old sinner like this tempt you away from your proper work?"

"Come and help me finish the port," said Sir William soothingly. "Denys isn't drinking, and if he listens to you, you'll only unsettle him. You can get fifty men to write history for one who'll make it. What scope does Oxford offer to a young man?"

"You can get fifty to make history for one who knows how to write it. What scope does Westminster offer to this particular young man?"

"Downing Street and the Abbey," said Sir William combatively.

Martineau picked up a menu and handed it to the old man.

"Write down the names of the men who were Prime Ministers of England when Gibbon was writing 'The Decline and Fall.'"

Sir William handed back the menu.

"Write down Gibbon's admission of the debt he owed the House of Commons in enabling him to write 'The Decline and Fall.'"

"You're hedging," said Martineau triumphantly; "you as good as confess that history's his sphere and the Commons are only fit to give him experience."

"Put the question to the culprit," said Sir William,

pointing to Denys, whose dark eyes were shining with pleasure at the professor's compliment.

"History for choice," he said briefly, "politics of necessity. I feel I have to. That's an answer that pleases no one," he added, with a laugh.

Martineau prepared to leave them. "Don't bring him into the library, Farling," he said warningly. "You'll lose him if you do."

Denys paid the bill and accompanied Sir William to the smoking-room. Over coffee and a cigar he decided that, bitter as was his reluctance to continue his present furtive double life, its bitterest feature was the necessity of abandoning the work which afforded him every prospect of wide and early fame, and in which the ardour and passion of his being lay buried.

. . . . .

A week later found him crossing the park from Buckingham Gate with the intention of dining again at his club. It was a mild September evening and the only immediate blot on his happiness lay in the fact that as usual he held a cigarette between his lips and as usual he was without matches. Failing to meet even an enemy whose matchbox he could borrow, he was reduced to walking through St. James's Palace in the hopes of procuring assistance from the lift-man at Sir William's flat in Cleveland Row. On approaching the doorway he found a car drawn up with the Farling crest, and a Farling footman standing at the door with a rug over his arm. Then the sound of a soft, eager voice reached him, and Sheila appeared in sight, draped in a scarlet silk evening cloak and followed by Maurice Weybrook.

"Hallo! Denys," she exclaimed as she caught sight of him. "Maurice is taking me to the theatre. Why don't you join us? We haven't got a stall for you, but you may be able to get one at the box-office. Do come."

"Give me a match, Maurice, and then I shall be able to deal with the situation. Sheila, haven't you learnt to recognise the grim, resolute expression on the face of a man who hasn't dined? I can consider no invitations which deprive me of a much-needed meal."

Sheila turned to her escort.

"Maurice, I've left my opera glasses upstairs. Will you be a good angel and fetch them? That's better," she went on to Denys as Maurice disappeared into the lift. "Our Maurice is like a legacy, one of the easiest things in the world to get rid of, as a general rule, but sometimes entailing grave responsibilities—such as going to the theatre," she added. "A good work, but very depressing. I want a lot of cheering up. That's why you're going to have supper with me to-night after the theatre. Homard au gratin, caviar, a wing of partridge, everything that the greedy soul loves. You can go upstairs and ask what I've ordered and order anything more that takes your fancy. I'm in one of my sweetest moods. I'm going to be really nice to you."

"Why?" asked Denys blankly.

"Because it's your birthday. . . ."

"But it isn't."

"It might have been. It might have been mine, too, only it isn't. What fun if we were twins! Because it might equally well be Maurice's birthday; because

it's a good world; because I love you—oh! what on earth d'you want reasons for? Because I've got a lot to say; because I haven't seen you for a week; because I've had Maurice on my hands for five mortal days. Any reason you like. About half-past eleven, and I'll never forgive you if you're late, and you're not to smoke over the food if you're there first, and you must send Father Time to bed if he shows signs of being in the way, and don't make a pig of yourself at dinner or you won't be able to eat any supper, and Servan's homard au gratin's simply wonderful. Melts in the mouth. My word, I'm out of breath."

She lay back in the car, fanning herself with a glove and bubbling with sheer joy of life till Maurice reappeared.

"Oh, thank you, Maurice," she said. "I'm so sorry to have troubled you. I was quite right, Denys isn't using his spare room next week and will be delighted to have you. I've just asked him. Now we must hurry along or we shall be late. Good-bye, Denys."

Her manner to Maurice was so conducive and her reference to the spare room in Buckingham Gate so inexplicable that Denys exhausted every combination of suspicions as he dined and smoked in preparation for their meeting. Since his first meeting with Sheila he had the feeling of being made an innocent and unwitting accessory to a series of extraordinarily elaborate conspiracies of which she alone held the clues. Some day he was certain that she would involve him in serious trouble, but until that came he was forced to agree with the unanimous male estimate of her, namely,

that she was very lovable, very pretty, and entirely unintelligible.

He had been sitting for ten minutes in the flat in Cleveland Row when the lift clanged open, a latch-key was tempestuously inserted into the lock of the front door, and Sheila burst into the dining-room. Throwing off her cloak she seized him by the hand, led him to a chair, and sat down opposite.

"Now I want to be amused," she began. "Maurice is really depressingly dull: I'm so sorry for you having to put up with him for a night. Oh, I'd better explain about that. The Badstows are shutting up Grosvenor Square at the end of this week and going abroad, so Maurice will be at a loose end till he goes to Oxfordshire. You've got to do your share in the good work, so I've billeted him on you."

"What's the good work?" asked Denys humbly. "I like my right hand to know what my left hand is doing."

"Caviar, please. Oh, more than that, I'm hungry. Well, you'll have to go without, then. No! I don't want it. And something to drink. I'm sorry, what were you saying? Oh, about the good work. My friend, my youthful friend, my good-looking young friend, my rather-adorable-young-friend-if-you-weren't-so-deadly-serious-at-times, give ear: Maurice is seeing life. I accompany him to the theatre to convince him that Daphne isn't the only girl in creation: he goes to stay with you in order to see what a comfortable, untroubled existence the modern young bachelor enjoys. Your flat is quite perfect in its way, Denys; I could live there myself. Yes, don't say it: it's too obvious. Any-

way, you're going to be the model host, and you're going to lay yourself out to entertain Maurice. He'll get up in time for lunch at the club, and he'll take gentle walking exercise down Bond Street and the Burlington Arcade, and he'll dine in the Piccadilly grill-room and spend the evening at a music-hall, and then a convivial supper at Romano's. I helped him map it all out. It's the choice of Hercules, that on one side and a day's slumming with Daphne on the other. Oh, and before I forget it, old John Collison is very ill; he's giving up the hounds. It's quite on the cards that they'll invite Maurice to hunt them. It's a horribly expensive hunt, and nobody will want to take John Collison's place in a hurry, but if Maurice's uncle backs him up, there's another nail in the coffin of the Poplar slums. And all this time I'm getting hungrier and hungrier and not a morsel have I had time to eat. Why don't you look after me properly and keep me amused instead of leaving me to do all the talking?"

"I can't compete when you're talking that pace, Sheila; however, if you'll fill your mouth very full of caviar . . . Has your grandfather told you that I'm going to contest Riversley when old Collison retires? Nod your head if you can't speak. Well, that's the most amusing thing I can think of at the moment. While you've been deceiving Maurice I've been pegging away. You always took a very flattering interest in my political future, even though you thought a lectureship at Oxford was more my sphere. Well, with anything like luck I shall be in the House before the end of the year. I think the first round goes to me, Sheila."

"Have you ever read Von der Goltz on 'War'? Lord! no, *I* haven't. My dear, do I look as if I read books like that? Only it's the thing that's always quoted by the newspapers when there's any fighting on. 'Never do what the enemy expects you to do,' or something like that. You're playing into my hands the whole time. I saw that in Devonshire."

"You're nearer the truth than you think," said Denys reflectively. "It was a very narrow escape."

"I know. If Aunt Margaret and I hadn't come in at that moment, Daphne would have broken it off with Maurice and you'd have gone riding into the lists with her glove in your helmet. Wouldn't you, Denys? Own up!"

He sat looking at his distorted reflection in the concave surface of a soup spoon.

"It was nearer even than that. I almost said I'd deny my gods just to please her, without dragging Maurice in at all, or pushing him out, rather—which shows how dangerous a young woman like Daphne can be in her influence. Then you and Lady Parkstone came in and saved me. There's a delicious irony about it, Sheila. It gives me great pleasure to think of your recommending me as a likely person to help your uncle, bringing Daphne almost to the point of robbing me of everything I've struggled for, and then walking in ten minutes too soon and spoiling all your carefully-laid schemes."

Sheila placed her elbows on the table and favoured him with a singularly sweet smile.

"You don't regret your visit to Devonshire, do you? I shouldn't like to feel that. I should like to think of

you going to sleep with Daphne's face to give you pleasant dreams, and I should like you to wake up and think of her eyes. They're rather wonderful eyes, aren't they? When you look into them you feel how horribly mean and small you are beside her. And I should like you to eat and drink and smoke and work with the feeling that her eyes are always watching you. And then, just as a test case, I should like someone to tempt you, offer you a bribe to do something you might have done before you met her. Oh, my dear, we're none of us perfect, not even me. And then I should like to see you coming to tell me that it couldn't be done."

She paused to enjoy the effect of her teasing.

"And so the world wags on. Oh, I never congratulated you on your nomination, or whatever it is. I will now. I hope you'll be elected. I'll come and canvass for you, if I may. And then you can congratulate me on my success with Maurice. When he comes to stay with you, ask him what he thinks of me. Of course you never value me properly, but Maurice will. Well, well, we're not eating. What are you going to have now?"

"I have no fault to find with the homard au gratin," said Denys, reclaiming the dish.

"My dear, it's frightfully indigestible; you'll die in silent agony if you do."

"Servan will think we're angry with him if I leave any," said Denys, reaching for the red pepper.

CHAPTER IX

THE RIVERSLEY ELECTION

"If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!"
BROWNING: "SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER."

"DENYS can't complain that this election isn't exciting public interest," remarked Sir William, turning to the middle page of *The Times*; "the papers won't leave it alone."

"He's a marked man to the end of his days, whether he gets in or not," said Maurice.

Lord and Lady Parkstone, Lady Daphne, Sheila, Sir William, Denys, and a number of willing political workers were gathered together in Lord Badstow's house in Oxfordshire, with Maurice acting as host in the absence of his uncle. They would have met there at the end of the month in any case, to be present at the ball which Maurice had obtained permission to give on condition of holding it at a time when his uncle would not be disturbed by furniture-moving. The election had precipitated their arrival. As soon as Parliament met for the autumn session, the long-expected retirement of John Collison had been announced, the writ issued for the election of a new member, and a feverish canvass instituted on behalf of both candidates. As Sir William remarked, the

election was exciting unusual interest, not so much on account of its effect on the Government as by reason of the personality of one of the candidates.

A fortnight earlier "The Trustees of Posterity" had been flung in the teeth of a world made hungry by inspired paragraphs of a cryptic and appetising savour, and as Lord Parkstone's preface made handsome acknowledgment of the services rendered by Mr. Denys Playfair, "the well-known writer on social subjects," it followed that Mr. Denys Playfair's nomination received unprecedented notice. No one had quite decided what to make of the book. The high Tory organs denounced it as "the betrayal of Conservatism," their more advanced contemporaries spoke of it as "a courageous and enlightened statement of policy," "a sincere and thoughtful attempt to solve some of the most complex problems of modern civilisation." The Liberal papers headed their leading articles, "The Passing of Obscurantism," the Radicals asked with mild and anxious scorn whether Saul also was among the prophets.

Sir William, giving full play to his passion for intrigue, directed his attention on the one hand to the attitude of the official Conservative leaders, on the other to the verdict of the Labour Party. No pronouncement was at present forthcoming from the Front Bench, which was divided between admiration of Lord Parkstone's imaginative originality and consternation at his audacity. The Labour Party was unequivocal in its support. After formally proclaiming its customary detachment from both the collusive, historic parties, it solemnly blessed the programme set

out in the book and promised its unwavering allegiance to the Conservative Party or any portion of it which rallied round the standard of Lord Parkstone.

For three happy weeks Sir William directed, educated, and misled public opinion in London. He was responsible for the anticipatory paragraphs: a ponderous episcopal edict of excommunication was the result of a luncheon at the Athenæum which he had devoted to explaining that "The Trustees of Posterity" in its chapter on Eugenics interfered with the divine monopoly of control in the matter of population. As he told Denys: "You'll never get a reform carried out in this country till you've made sure of the bishops' opposition." He had contributed at length to a "Symposium of Representative Men" organised by a leading London halfpenny paper, and he hoped to secure a telling cartoon in the influential pages of *Punch*. Support and opposition were as nothing compared with notoriety: the great thing, he explained, was to get the book talked about; and by the time he left town for Riversley, the leaders of the party had decided to refrain from active opposition, Labour had announced its intention of voting solidly for Denys, the Liberal press was peevishly declaiming against the invasion of its "corner" in ameliorative legislation, and a deputation of Female Suffrage Societies had almost been beguiled by Sir William's confidential profundity into a belief that their cause was intimately wrapped up with the success of the Conservative candidate.

"I've been through it myself," he told Daphne,

" and I've helped others to go through it, so I oughtn't to complain. But how any man can face the pettiness, the vulgarity, the bitterness of a contested election, passes my comprehension. It's all right when you're in—except for the people you find there—but the getting in . . . How Denys must hate it ! "

The election was not being conducted with any unusual acerbity, the heckling was no more strenuous, the repartees were no cheaper, the personalities no more offensive, but an unpleasant episode had occurred in the early days of the canvass which had compelled Sir William, seasoned as he was to the brutality of electioneering, to take a lower view of the English canons of taste. Denys was making a door-to-door canvass which brought him into the neighbourhood of an extensively patronised public house. A van was standing at the door with the driver on the box refreshing himself. Catching sight of Denys he put down his mug with the words, " Hi ! look here." Denys looked up and saw the whip lash being tied into a knot and slipped over the driver's left thumb. With a jerk of the right hand the lash was drawn taut, and the driver exclaimed, with an intonation of pain, "Well, I'm hanged ! " There was an appreciative laugh from a little group of loafers at the door, followed by a derisive cheer, " Vote for Playfair," then a chorus, " *Hanged* if we do ! " At every subsequent meeting Denys could be sure of an ironical interruption exhorting the world to vote for Playfair, and a voluminous determined chorus of " *Hanged* if we do." Lately the chorus had changed their note and announced that they would be shot if they did. Evidently an unknown

friend had given one political argument time to sink in before producing another.

Denys bore the attack with more equanimity than his supporters. The story of the double tragedy was set out in black and white: the marvel to him was, not that it had been raked up after so long, but that it had never been used against him before. Lord Parkstone, who had been admitted to the secret before meeting Denys, could only shrug his shoulders and sigh regretfully; Daphne went white with anger when the allusion was made plain to her, and Maurice closed the eye of one opponent and cut the lip of another in the interests of good manners. A note of apology for the methods of his friends absolved Jack Melbourne from complicity but did nothing to identify the originator of the attack. Sheila, holding herself superbly aloof from the whole campaign, neither applauded nor sympathised.

"I shall be very glad when it's all over," she remarked with an ill-suppressed yawn. "If this is an average election, preserve me from politics."

"You're hard to please, miss," said her grandfather. "It's very far from being an average election, as you'd know if you came to any of that young man's meetings. They're wonderful performances. It's oratory. Sometimes I get nervous and fidget in my chair for fear he'll over-reach himself, but he doesn't. He doesn't. He can use language that other men would be afraid to use; they'd be self-conscious. He'll have to restrain himself in the House, they can't stand poetry in a man's speeches there, but for a popular audience it's astonishingly effective. He works them up to extraordinary enthusiasm."

Sheila sniffed contemptuously. "Some people might say that you're all a little infatuated about that boy. I should have thought anybody could have impressed the sort of audience you get here."

"It's not confined to the audience."

"I'm waiting for it to come my way."

"Of course you're an exception to most rules," said Sir William banteringly, "but it's something of an achievement to have pumped so much energy and devotion into Maurice. Let alone Daphne," he added in an undertone; "she's a different girl."

Sheila looked across the room to a corner where her cousin sat ticking off names in a note-book. Since the election started, Daphne's development had been astonishing. Diffidence and timidity had fallen from her like a cloak: the inspiration of working for Denys transformed her. Lord Parkstone raised his eyebrows in mild surprise to see her canvassing and arguing, fearlessly approaching stubborn and discourteous recalcitrants, wheedling the laggards, and from one and all refusing to take "No" for an answer. Lady Parkstone, too, was surprised, and thought it all as undignified as it was unnecessary: nothing but her promise to Sir William restrained her from active interference. Denys was wrapped too deeply in his dream to notice anything. Sheila looked on with the contemptuous tolerance of a god watching predestination at work.

"And Denys himself is another revelation," went on Sir William; "he goes through it all like a sleep-walker. Why, I can remember when he was so shy that you couldn't get him to talk till you were alone with him.

And sensitive! He was just like a girl. You remember that dreadful night on board, when I got on to the subject of his poor grandfather, he went scarlet and you could see him trembling all over. Nothing moves him now. He's self-controlled, unconscious of all that's going on round him, in fact, like someone in a trance. He's twice the man he was."

"About half, I should have said," commented Sheila deliberately.

Sir William drew her on to his knee and captured a hand. "Quarrelling, as usual?"

"No." Sheila spoke with a weary effort to seem patient. "Only you're all so busy with this rotten election that you none of you see you're killing him by inches. I mean exactly what I say—you've about halved his prospects of life since you got him down here."

"He's all right," said Sir William, a shade uneasily.

"Anyone would think I was the only person in the house with eyes in my head. You needn't believe me unless you like, but I tell you he's dying before your eyes." She spoke in a whisper, with a catch in her voice that her grandfather was careful not to notice. "Oh, don't imagine I care, it's nothing to do with me; but the way you and Daphne and Maurice and Uncle Herbert all fall down and worship and then let him get himself into this state . . . really, you are impossible!"

"It's only to-day and to-morrow. Then he can rest as much as he likes. Ask him to come south with us in the 'Bird of Time.'"

"A day and a half in mid-November, driving about

and jumping in and out of a warm car, and getting wet and tired and having to speak, speak, speak . . . ! Oh, let me go, Father Time ! I'm sick of you all."

She dragged herself away from him and hurried out of the room. Sir William shook his head in perplexity. Something had come over Sheila the last few days which he frankly failed to understand. It was all very well to accuse him of indifference to Denys, but her own attitude had been freezing. When she condescended to cease ignoring his existence, it was for the purpose of inflicting a stab which Denys seemed to bear with exemplary patience. For six months Sir William had suspected something more than mere interest in Sheila's attitude to the boy, but if his suspicions were well founded she had curious methods of engaging his affection. They consisted in going out of her way to be pleasant to Maurice, with intervals of extreme unkindness to Denys. And it was not with Denys that the fault lay : he did all in his power to win her back to the old friendly relationship, and his comparative unconsciousness of the way Daphne was toiling on his behalf put any idea of jealousy out of the question. Sir William sighed and resigned himself to his usual fate, which was to linger on in patient ignorance until such time as Sheila thought fit to enlighten him.

Upstairs in her room, standing at the window with flushed face and bitten lip, Sheila could have told why the world had suddenly grown hateful to her. Half her plans had miscarried, the other half were prospering with a success that was harder to bear than

any failure. Daphne was in a state of infatuation, hypnotised by Denys' personality: any idea that she would exert a restraining influence on him was laughable. And Denys was living out his dream and materialising his vision in a way that was hardly credible. Sheila had avoided his meetings, but the reports of them reached her with the added testimony of those who had sat silent under the spell. His audience lay at his mercy, he could do what he liked with them. It was an empire won not over an emotional, ignorant, gullible mob, but over hardened debaters like her uncle and jaded cynics like her grandfather.

Her victories brought no sweetness. Maurice had been wooed away unresistingly, contemptibly, but at the price of her own self-respect, and the problem which had faced Daphne in Devonshire had now solved itself. She turned from the window and paced fretfully up and down the room, asking herself why her success brought so little consolation. The answer which rose to her lips and was pressed back with an angry denial, was that she was saving Daphne at the price of losing Denys. And she had suddenly realised that it was a price she did not want to pay.

Downstairs in the hall Sir William and Daphne sat waiting for Denys to come in with orders for the afternoon's canvass, and discussing the eternal question of the rival candidates' prospects of victory.

"Jack Melbourne is a consummate master of the 'mine de circonstance,' said Sir William, rising up and standing with his back to the fire. "In less than twelve months I've seen him as the barrister, the man of business, and the parliamentary candidate. Every

outward detail was perfect: he would have imposed on a trained detective."

"Sounds like Jacky Melbourne," said Maurice, who had just entered the room and dropped into the chair which Sir William had vacated.

"It is. I remember meeting him in Middle Temple Lane a few months ago, hurrying along with a pair of spectacles stranded in mid-forehead after the fashion of one King's Counsel, and smoking a nine-inch cheroot immortalised by another. He waved a red silk handkerchief in the manner of a third, took snuff as I remember Russell of Killowen taking it, and stopped me in order to show the precise gesture which an alert junior employs in plucking the gown of his leader to draw attention to an important point which has been overlooked. The whole thing was extraordinarily impressive: if I'd been a solicitor nothing would have induced me to retain him."

"I liked him as the City Man," grunted Maurice. "Jacky always wanted a fur coat and couldn't find the mug who'd give him one, so when his guv'nor told him he'd got to go into the City, Jacky saw his chance. 'Ten o'clock to-morrow morning,' says father. 'Right,' says Jacky. 'I must get some clothes first,' and—my stars! he got 'em all right. Slipped along to father's tailor and told 'em to reach him down the best fur coat they'd got. Then he coveted a diamond ring from somewhere, turned the stone to the inside of his hand, and raided father's cigar cabinet. I saw him the same afternoon at the club. It was a pipin' hot May day, and there was Jacky standin' in a fur coat and a pot-hat, with a pair of glasses on the tip of

his nose, wavin' his hands about his head, diamond ring and all, sayin' he wath a buthineth man and we muthn't be hard on him. It didn't take father long to see he'd missed his train sendin' Jacky to the City."

"How has he got himself up for the election?" asked Daphne.

"I've hardly seen him," said Maurice; "has he come your way, Sir William?"

"Oh yes; he asked my advice on the question of disguise. He was wearing the fur coat and an expensive-looking orchid, but didn't know how to deal with the collar problem. It was a choice between a low Balfourian type and the cut-away Churchi[illegible]iety. He compromised by selecting the Chur[illegible]lar and always gripping the lapels of his coat [illegible]en he was speaking. I had to warn him against an eye-glass, however: that's the exclusive privilege of a Tariff Reformer and doesn't look well on the Radical candidate."

"What chance do you think Mr. Melbourne's got, granddad?" asked Daphne.

"Oh, no chance at all. His whole election has been one long piece of elaborate buffoonery, very funny at times, and I expect he's enjoyed every moment of it, but the electors like to be treated more seriously. Jack doesn't try to hide his contempt for the whole thing. In some ways I'm glad not to be his father."

"They're canvassing very hard for him. The big, red-haired man that you see everywhere, he's called at every house in the constituency."

"Wilmot? Yes, it's a heaven-sent opportunity for him. He used to be managing director of the

Anglo-Hibernian and carried a good deal of weight. Why, I don't know. I tried for five years to get rid of him, but my colleagues didn't share my view. He's gone now, since the last general meeting. When Denys was on the board he had the temerity to criticise Wilmot and indulge in prophecies about the position he was getting the company into. Of course there's no harm in prophecy, provided it doesn't come true. Unfortunately Denys' did. There was very nearly a scandal, I understand, when the shareholders began to ask questions. For one thing, Wilmot tried to make the directors' report intelligible, and that's against the A.B.C. of shareholders' meetings. Denys warned him that the fat would be in the fire the moment he was betrayed into lucidity. And he was. All shareholders want is the balance-sheet: they hold it upside down and read through the bank balances, and then vote for the adoption of the report without a murmur. Wilmot tried to take them into his confidence and justify himself. Well, as Denys warned him, there were a good many things that simply couldn't be justified. The crash came, Wilmot had to resign, and now he's looking for everybody's blood. It just shows you the danger of prophecy."

"They say he's going to heckle to-night," said Daphne, who had developed an unrivalled faculty for acquiring early news of the enemy's movements.

"Leave him to me," said Maurice with gusto. "If there's any heavin' out to be done, I'm the man. These elections are too tame for my likin'; there's no scrappin' to speak of. Hullo! here's the candidate himself," he added, as Denys and Lord Parkstone

came into the room. "What's the startin'-price, Denny?"

"Evens, I should think. I'm ready to start if everyone else is. Can we have the cars at a quarter to eight, Maurice?"

"I'll go and order 'em now. Evens be blowed all the same, Denny, it's goin' to be a walk-over."

"It's going to be a very near thing," said Lord Parkstone, taking an unoccupied chair beside his father-in-law. "Maurice is wrong, we shall have to fight our hardest to get Denys in. Melbourne's speeches seem to please his audience, somehow: there's no 'damned nonsense' about politics in them; just a few good stories to put his house in a good temper with him, and then he proceeds to talk about himself till it's time to go on to another meeting."

"I've never heard him talk of anything else," said Sir William. "Hallo, Sheila. Are you coming canvassing?" he asked, as she came down the stairs.

"No, I'm saving myself up for to-night. I suppose I must attend one meeting, just as a matter of form," she said pointedly, not deigning to look at Denys.

"It'll be a great meeting," said Sir William as Maurice helped him into his coat. "We're not inside the citadel yet; it'll need a big speech to wind up with."

Denys walked over to the fireplace to arrange his scarf in the mirror.

"That ought to be good news for you, Sheila," he remarked in an undertone. "We're not inside the citadel yet."

"No, and you won't be a penny the better off when

you are there," she said, opposing him for opposition's sake.

"That we shall see, my friend. I only hope there won't be much more fighting." He sighed wearily, and the sigh turned into a cough.

Sheila's voice softened and dropped. "Denys, don't go, I want to speak to you. Did you see the doctor this morning? Well, what did he say?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"What did he say?"

"He talked about the weather."

"Denys, are you going to tell me what he said or shall I have to ask him?"

"Don't ask him or he might tell you, and it would be unprofessional. Like me, he hoped there would not be much more fighting."

"And what does that mean?"

"It means that if I'm beaten, I shall be beaten by my own rotten organs and not by clever little Sheila's schemings. And it means that I want to go to bed instead of having to make this big speech your grandfather talks about. It means good news all round for you, my friend," he added with the bitterness of extreme fatigue.

Sheila got up and began to walk toward the library. Then she turned and said almost in a whisper: "I've had some pretty horrid things said to me in my time, Denys, usually by you, too. But I never thought you could be such a brute as to say that to me."

Denys watched her out of the room; then, fetching himself a cigarette from the table beside the fireplace, he took his place in the first car. As the rings of blue

smoke expanded and dissolved above his head he tried to fathom why a remark of innocent intention should have sent Sheila from the room with tears in her eyes and a sob in her voice.

It was the last day of organised canvassing: the morrow would be taken up with eleventh hour appeals to sluggards and waverers, then would come the poll. Both sides were working their hardest, Denys' supporters infected with his own enthusiasm and purpose, Melbourne's endeavouring to communicate something of their own ardour to their candidate. At Riversley Ford the three cars separated centrifugally, Lord Parkstone and an agent in one, Maurice and another zealous worker in a second, Daphne and her grandfather in a third. Denys had a door-to-door canvass to make in Church Road and was to be picked up at the Victoria Memorial Hall in two hours' time, when Daphne had scoured the out-lying, north-west part of the constituency.

He knocked at the first door with the reluctance of one who does not relish contact with reality. The public meetings were part of his dream, he had pictured the scene a thousand times: the gaslit hall crowded with white, indistinguishable faces, the first impatient shuffling and whispering, the growing silence, the spreading spell, the rising passion and plastic, melting emotion. He had proved his power till the knowledge made him reckless and contemptuous; he would pause to make them feel the agony of suspense, or single out one acolyte to be the bearer of his message: a man so chosen would sit fascinated with parted lips and fixed, unblinking eyes till he had

ended. It was for this that he had waited and in this way that his vision would be fulfilled.

As the tide of human faces receded and disappeared, his own inspiration and power left him. Removed from the atmosphere of expectancy, and without the stimulus of either sympathy or opposition, his imagination went flat and his language grew commonplace. The vision grew blurred when he passed from a windy, rain-swept street into a musty parlour oppressive with hideous over-ornamentation. Weeks of canvassing left on his mind the impression of countless bare-armed women, deferential, irrelevant, and interminable, uninterested in politics but anxious to oblige; multitudinous, inquisitive children, mysteriously appearing and stealthily snatched from view; husky, confidential husbands, not so anxious to oblige but conscious of their power, aggressive in their dogmatism, and insufferably loquacious. Whales warring with elephants discovered a common battleground more quickly than the generalisations, first principles, and particular instances of candidate and elector.

Denys sighed with relief when the end of Church Road was reached and his last canvass was completed. The irksomeness of the work was hardly more irritating than its futility. Promises of support had flowed in upon him, the note book was heavily marked with the red cross that indicated a vote gained; but for the value of the promises he could not speak. Working the same road and six houses ahead of him, he had espied the burly frame and fiery head of Wilmot. Probably Wilmot's list recorded the same number of promises from the self-same voters. With a glance

at his watch he slackened his pace and strolled in the direction of the Memorial Hall: the two hours were up, but Daphne's car had not yet appeared, and the steps of the Memorial Hall were occupied by Wilmot and a girl in a long fur coat. He could not see her face and was dawdling with a view to avoiding her companion when he heard his name called and discovered that Wilmot's inclined head and affable voice were traceable to the circumstance that Sheila was talking to him.

"When's the car coming?" she called out. From her tone he judged that their parting earlier in the afternoon was not yet forgotten. "I've had as much of these slushy roads as I want."

"It ought to be here now," he said, coming up to them. "Ah, Wilmot, how are you?"

"I'm all right," said Wilmot with easy insolence, keeping his hands in his pockets to discourage the possibility of further advances.

"Good canvass?" asked Sheila with an ill-disguised taunt in her voice.

"A fair number of promises," said Denys, pretending to consult his list.

"Promises don't cost much," said Wilmot. "God knows you deserve them, after the promises you've made in your speeches. And if the promises you've picked up to-day pan out at the same figure as the promises you've been throwing about the last few weeks, my candidate's got an easy job."

"Well, well!" Denys saw no profit in continuing to talk with Wilmot in his present mood. "Coming to the meeting to-night, Sheila?"

"Not unless I'm dragged," she answered ungraciously.

"Better come, Miss Farling," said Wilmot with a malevolent grin. "We're all going to be there; it'll be a bright meeting."

"I've had all the politics and speech-making I want up at the house."

"Ah, but it's all on one side there; what you want is a question here and there, a little opposition. It brings your fine speakers down to earth, stimulates 'em. Your candidate 'll be worth hearing to-night," he added with sinister gusto.

"Please don't call him *my* candidate. Hullo, here's the car! No, it isn't, it's Mr. Melbourne."

The rival candidate whirled erratically down the street and pulled up more by luck than judgment opposite the hall.

"Hallo, Denys," he cried out, "I've been pruning your supporters. We ran over Isaacstein on the way down."

"You don't mean to say you killed anyone!" exclaimed Sheila, roused out of herself by his flippant tone.

"I'm afraid he recovered," said Melbourne with detachment, "he was the sort of man who would."

"I don't think I even know him by sight," said Denys.

"You should always know your electors by sight," explained Melbourne, "or else you may run over the wrong man. My father pointed out Isaacstein to me last week at the Cosmopolitan Club. Any of your lot own this car?"

"Not that I know of," said Denys. "Where did you get it?"

"Down by the schools; there were a lot of them and this seemed an improvement on our father's Jubilee model. Besides, I'm not allowed to drive that. If you see anyone looking for a car, tell him to go on looking."

"How's the election going?" called out Sheila as he hauled Wilmot on board and prepared to drive away.

"Election? Election? Oh, Lord, yes, careless of me." Relinquishing the wheel he stood up, removed his hat, and thrust one hand into the breast of his coat. "My country! in what state do I find thee, the Angel of Death is without, if you are going to give a preference to the colonies you must put a tax on food, Protection is not only dead but, no, not before ladies, I bring peace with honour, the resources of civilisation are not exhausted, Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right, every private carries a marshal's baton in his haversack, l'état c'est moi, le style et l'homme c'est la même chose, Wein Weib und Gesang, Eile mit Weile, lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch' entrate, Scots wha hae, delenda est Carthago. I'm having the time of my life. Are you there, Wilmot? you're not to fall out till you've voted. Anyone wishing to propose a vote of confidence in the candidate may do so. Good-bye, good-bye! 'Once more into the breach, Wil*mot*, once more.' Don't forget Isaacstein, Denys; you'll find him a mile or two back on the Elham road, 'a bleeding piece of earth and none so poor to do him reverence.'"

"I wonder if he talks to his meetings like that,"

said Sheila, watching the car disappear down the road with the action of a convulsed crab.

"I shouldn't be surprised; you'd better go and hear him to-night."

"I think I shall. Oh, good! here's the car at last."

There was no sign of Daphne, and Sir William from the front seat explained that her labours were not yet over and that she was being brought back by her father. "Climb inside, both of you," he said, "and let's be getting home. You must have a lie down before dinner, Denys, or you won't be fit to speak to-night."

"Tired?" asked Sheila with a wintry advance towards compassion as Denys lay back wearily in his corner.

"Just a bit." Then after a pause he asked humbly: "Forgiven?"

"Is there anything to forgive?"

"You know best. Why can't we be friends, Sheila?"

"Because—that's just the one thing we can't be," she replied with a significance which was plain enough to herself. Then a gust of penitence swept over her for the pin-prick campaign of the last fortnight. "I wonder you think I'm worth it."

"Do you?" he said softly.

On their arrival home, Denys was dismissed to his room, and Sir William waited with Sheila in the hall to receive the returned stragglers and ascertain the success of their afternoon's labours. The general opinion bore out Lord Parkstone's statement that the chances were uncomfortably level.

"Well, we've done our best, no one can do more,"

said Sir William. "And we shall all be late for dinner if we don't go and dress."

Two hours later Denys and his supporters entered the hall where their meeting was being held. The gas-lit, white-washed room served the purpose of a County School by day and retained by night something of the County scholars' bouquet. Texts, maps, and black-boards loomed incongruously over the heads of the audience; a subtle blend of ink and damp corduroy assailed the nostrils of those herded in the back rows; ink partially drowned in Cœur de Jeanette floated up to the horse-shoe platform from the seats of quality. As they walked up the central gangway Daphne noticed the conspicuous figure of Wilmot reinforcing a familiar group of critics and questioners half-way up the hall. Then the chairman of the local Conservative Association opened the proceedings with a colourless, platitudinous speech of ten minutes' duration: at its conclusion Lord Parkstone from the chair called upon Denys to address the meeting. An outburst of cheering greeted him as he arose and bowed to the audience. Turning half round he bowed to the chairman, singled out Sheila for a bow on her own account, and waited for the stamping and clapping to abate. Sheila watched him with interest: of the hundreds gathered in the hall probably she alone had never heard him make a speech. The platform curved forward on the wings like a half moon. She had seated herself as far as possible from the chair, and at right angles to the speaker and audience prepared to watch the effect of the one on the other.

Denys opened slowly, congratulating his audience

that they were hearing him for the last time: fourteen days' unmitigated politics were more than enough in a country where—it was said—the House of Commons was fallen into disrepute, the questions at issue had lost their grandeur, and passion and an over-legislated country yearned for respite and repose. The reforming zeal of the last few years had left no corner unexplored: surely it was a moment when they could sit complacent and compliment themselves on achieving tolerable perfection in an imperfect world. If evils still existed, if hunger pinched or injustice rankled, Parliament would set it right, and the electors who determined the form of Parliament would see that their representatives were empowered to make the social conscience easy. But first they had a right to insist that a case was made out for disturbing their wonted complacency.

His voice fell a tone, and Sheila looked up to watch the method of indictment. Pitilessly and dispassionately he carried them over the ground traversed in the early chapters of "The Trustees," his own restraint and aloofness making the accusation doubly damning. The audience grew uncomfortable, their placidity was shaken—first by conscience, then by fear. "Manufacturing civilisation is like manufacturing anything else: there is a bill to pay, waste products to be scrapped, profits, perhaps, to be drawn. The difference is that men and women are the waste products, the bill is paid in their sweat and blood, not a large share of the profits goes to the workers; some day they will wonder whether the finished article was worth the labour." For five minutes he played with revolution, hinting, intimidating, expounding with ambiguous

irony its ease and attractiveness. Sheila watched the faces of those who sat in the front rows and then let her eyes wander to the back benches.

Suddenly the voice began to gather speed. Assuming the diseased limbs and gangrened wounds of society, admitting or dismissing the idea of resentment and the possibility of revenge, as human, tender souls dowered by God with love of the beautiful, would they not rouse themselves to purge and adorn the body of which each one of them formed a part? Visionaries, idealists, impracticable dreamers, they would be called all those names by the "plain men," the materialists, the men of the world. Yet . . . history was richer for its visionaries. . . Sheila sat forward with eyes fixed on the white, mobile face: he was speaking as she had made him speak when they sat alone under the early summer night and her presence was gradually forgotten. The spell which he cast over her was bewitching an audience of three hundred souls. Dreamily, yet with unfaltering command of glance and gesture, consciously varying the melody of an incomparable voice, he was filching their wills and numbing their power of resistance. Splashed with sunshine and fragrant with flowers, the world of his imagination was made real to them. With kindling passion the words swept on to the climax: then a pause; the voice was silent, the hands still, the blazing eyes half-closed. Painfully—Sheila knew how painfully—his hearers dropped into reality.

"Dreamers, yes." The voice had fallen to a conversational tone. "And a man is never forgiven for seeing visions. You and I may sit hoping and praying for a Golden Age, but we must never visualise it as I

have just done. We must never scheme for its accomplishment; we must remember we're practical, hard-headed men of the world, a little higher than hell and a long way lower than heaven. We are children of our generation. And yet . . . and yet . . . wherein are the dreams impracticable? You have power, had you the will . . . if it were really worth it! With a little faith, nothing could withstand you." He paused and picked up a flower from the table before him. "Some day—when it is too late—you will appreciate your power. You who manufacture this civilisation and you who control its making, you have never trusted each other. I had rather offer you an ideal than a threat—the ideal of working together for an end which you both know to be just and necessary. If you will not seek virtue for its own sake . . ." he shrugged his shoulders and dropped the flower—"you will learn how weak is your power of disunited defence against attack compared with your united strength in a common onslaught on the admitted common evils of society. Civilisation presses hardest on the insecure, lightest on those who have most to lose by social disruption. Unless employers and employed join hands, the employed will take reform into their own control, and of that no man can see the end. It is easier and safer to be an idealist. Labour knows the difficulty of consolidation and hopes for justice without recourse to extremes. If this consolidation were ever proved necessary, Labour would be irresistible: if Labour is forced to organise itself, its terms will rise. You know the relative voting strength: majorities in the constituencies, majorities in the House—and

short of turning a man into a woman or a woman into a man there is nothing the House of Commons cannot do, nothing it cannot seize, expropriate, tax out of existence at twenty shillings in the pound. They say class-feeling and party-bitterness are rising. I ask for power and authority to work for a settlement before the coming cleavage and ultimate appeal to numbers."

Once more he paused and glanced at Sheila. She returned his gaze steadily and then looked away down the hall. Speaking or standing silent he held the audience cowed, tense, expectant. Wilmot and his fellow critics dared make no interruption. She grew suddenly frightened and filled with a desire to cry out and warn them against their fate: the warning, could she have uttered it, would have been wasted: they were tacitly asking leave to grace his triumph. Their votes and influence were his; she alone knew how he would use them, and the force that was to have restrained him lay more deeply under his spell than the rest. She turned from the hall to the platform. Daphne was sitting three-quarter face to her, wrapped in an ermine cloak, her soft brown hair held down with the curved bar of tortoiseshell, her beautiful pale face turned eagerly towards Denys, her grave brown eyes shining with approval and admiration. Sir William lay back in an attitude of critical attention, legs crossed, finger-tips pressed together, watching the speaker; Lord Parkstone gazed with unseeing eyes over the heads of the audience to the back of the hall; Maurice sat open-mouthed, waiting for the next words.

Then with throbbing voice Denys approached the peroration. In six short, cruel sentences he reproached them for their purple, fine linen, and sumptuous daily fare: in six more, shimmering, exotic, and luxuriant, the vision was recalled and fixed in their memory: then he appealed for power to realise his vision. No longer sparing his strength or husbanding his voice, he urged and commanded with a force that could not be resisted. His hearers were carried out of themselves by the rushing torrent of exhortation; then the speech ended and the wild music was hushed.

For a minute there was silence, then the applause broke out. Sitting, standing, jumping on chairs, they shouted and laughed, waved their arms and clapped their hands. The uproar was deafening, and when after three minutes it showed signs of dying down, Maurice gave it fresh life with an ear-splitting view-halloo. After two unsuccessful attempts the chairman contrived to ask if the audience wished to put any questions to the candidate. One or two speakers with logs of their own to roll tried to extort a promise to assist in the rolling; one of Wilmot's satellites embarked on a damaging examination relative to the cost of the proposed reforms, and then artistically left the hall without pressing his advantage unduly; a shrill-voiced woman, tremulous with anticipated ill-usage, enquired what he proposed to do for the women, and was deposited in the snow with the oil-stove, to which she had attached herself, long before Denys could articulate a reply or Maurice hurl himself into the affray.

Then Wilmot arose with a handful of notes, placed

one foot on the chair which his satellite had vacated, and settled down to the congenial occupation of being as rude and disorderly as a nervous chairman would allow.

CHAPTER X

SHEILA LOSES THE FIRST GAME

"I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the love that lurks in all delight—
The love of thee—and in the blue heaven's height,
And in the dearest passage of a song.

Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits hidden, yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gather'd to thy heart."

ALICE MEYNELL: "RENOUNCEMENT."

"WE'VE all been listening to a very fine speech," he began with the unction of one who has an unpleasant duty to face and relishes its performance. "I expect we all feel rather ashamed of ourselves for going on living—'a long way lower than heaven,' yes, indeed. 'A little higher than hell,' that's something!"

Consulting his notes, he treated the audience to a recital of Denys' more exotic flowers of speech, knowing well the element of bathos which resides in all luxuriant imagery, and the intonation of voice and receptiveness of hearer which are needed to raise it to the sublime. Such irrelevant baiting roused no laughter among

those who remembered their own sensations when the words were originally spoken. Wilmot quickly changed his tactics.

"I daresay Mr. Playfair's surprised to see me here to-night because—to be quite frank—I've been working against him since the election started. You see, I'm a newcomer to this neighbourhood and—well, I try to be broad-minded in politics. I intended to vote for Mr. Melbourne because I've known him since he was a boy and his father for some years before that. However—I'm not bigoted. I'd heard so much of Mr. Playfair's speaking that I said I must give myself the pleasure of hearing him. So here we are."

Lord Parkstone half rose from the chair.

"Our time is limited, sir. If you have any questions to ask, will you please put them?"

Wilmot beamed pleasantly at the chairman.

"I'm just coming to them."

His notes had become disordered and he set himself with great deliberation to rearrange them. More than one chair creaked impatiently and Lord Parkstone engaged in a whispered consultation with Sir William. Denys was lying back in his chair in an attitude of collapse, and Sheila noted the change with interest. As he was speaking she was irresistibly reminded of that portrait of his grandfather which had hung in the library at Buckingham Gate; when the speech was ended, the nervous, fervid intensity of expression had departed, the dark eyes lost their lustre, and he sat with white, drawn face and trembling hands, hardly heeding the shower of congratulations which fell from his supporters on the platform. A corresponding change

took place in her own feelings: his warfare and her counter-warfare were forgotten, the plans she had made for Daphne were driven from her mind, and she only saw a frail figure kept animate by indomitable courage, and a life which had never known the joy and sunshine of her own existence. She wanted to cross to his chair, kneel down and take his hand in her own, to ask him to entrust himself to her and suffer her to share with him her own exuberant store of happiness. Then the bitter thought of the afternoon returned to her mind and she saw that by her own contriving it was ordained that she should have no part in his life, and happiness, if it came, was to come from Daphne.

At last Wilmot's notes were reduced to order.

"I don't know how to vote in this election, and there are a lot of people in the same boat with me. We've always voted Radical before." ("Shame!" from a pig-tailed upholder of the established order by the door.) "Shame or no shame, we felt we knew where we were; but the speech Mr. Playfair has just made carries us miles beyond anything we've ever dared advocate in our wildest and most revolutionary days."

"What on earth's he driving at?" whispered Lord Parkstone to Denys. "Ought I to stop him?"

"No, let him have his say; he's out for mischief and we'd better fight him in the light."

"Well, sir, ought I to vote for Mr. Playfair and the new Radicalism, or Mr. Melbourne and the Radicalism I know?"

"Vote for Playfair!" came in a roar from the back benches.

"Yes, I know, but . . . who is he? How do I

know I can trust him? On the one hand I see Mr. Melbourne: as I told you, I've known him since he was a small boy; I remember when his father was Radical member for the division and some of you will remember when his grandfather was Radical candidate. There's no doubt about his bona fides. Can we say the same of Mr. Playfair?"

Lord Parkstone rose and interrupted the speaker. "It is not in order for you to make a speech, sir; you can ask any reasonable questions you like, but otherwise I must ask you to sit down."

"I *am* asking a question, my lord, a very important question if I'm to vote for Mr. Playfair. I want to be sure of your candidate's bona fides. I don't want him to play the confidence trick on me."

He paused invitingly.

"What evidence of bona fides do you want, sir?" asked Denys.

"What evidence of bona fides can you give, sir?" The question was hurled back with extreme truculence, and Wilmot, feeling that he had won the interest and attention of the house, quickened his pace and addressed himself directly to the candidate.

"Your speech to-night was an echo, word for word, and sentiment for sentiment, of a book called 'The Trustees of Posterity,' one of the most revolutionary books ever issued in this country. It bore Lord Parkstone's name and he acknowledged the help he'd had from you. That was as it should be. From your speech to-night I should imagine every word except the signature came from your pen. I want to know what a Conservative ex-minister is doing with a book like

that? You'd have called it robbery, spoliation, and what not, if I'd written it. You must satisfy me that you're playing straight if you want my vote."

Lord Parkstone fidgeted nervously in his chair and Denys had again to warn him not to give Wilmot an opportunity of saying he had been gagged.

"Mr. Playfair asks for power. That was the key-note of his speech—power, power, power. What's he going to do with it? What's this new Radical-Conservative party going to do with it? Who are they? If Mr. Melbourne had written the book and asked for power to carry it into effect, he'd have had my vote for the asking. I know him." A pause. "I know his father." Another pause. "And I knew his grandfather. What does anyone here know of Mr. Playfair"—pause, and then significantly—"or his antecedents, before the day when he came carpet-bagging into Riversley as the Radical-Conservative candidate?"

He ended abruptly and sat down, leaving the audience to make what they could out of his speech. In the silence that followed Sheila looked across at Denys and saw that the fighting expression had settled upon his rigid features: neither of them had any doubt of the meaning behind Wilmot's repeated contrasts between the antecedents of the two candidates. Then Lord Parkstone rose up, watch in hand.

"If no one has any more questions to put to Mr. Playfair . . ." he began.

"Hadn't he better answer the questions that *have* been put?" Wilmot interrupted. "Since I came into this constituency I've heard rumours about Mr.

Playfair. Is he going to clear himself? Oh, it's no use shouting 'Order, order.' What does he say about those rumours? When he comes and says, 'Give me power, give me power!' and doesn't say what he's going to do with it, I've a right to know something of the man before I trust myself to him."

"Have you any objection to saying what the rumours are?" asked Lord Parkstone indecisively.

"None at all," said Wilmot, with cold, triumphant venom. "I've heard that Mr. Playfair's grandfather was hanged for murder and that his father was shot fighting against British troops. Is that true?"

A storm of hooting broke out at the brutality of the question, but Wilmot stood his ground doggedly and repeated his words when the uproar had subsided.

"Is that true, Lord Parkstone? Is that true, Mr. Playfair?"

"Perfectly," said Denys, with unconcern.

Wilmot considered the answer for a moment. "Thank you, sir; I only wanted to be sure of my ground."

He gathered up his notes and stumbled noisily into the gangway preparatory to leaving the hall. An uncanny silence had fallen on the meeting. The brusqueness of Wilmot's manner of speech had roused the latent irritability of the audience, but their resentment had collapsed before his bombshell. The savagery of the attack appalled them, and before they could recover from their first shock they were faced with an equal surprise in Denys' unmoved admission. References to hanging and shooting in the early days of the election must have been wasted on his regular

supporters, or if the reference had been explained no one had foreseen such a frontal attack. For a moment no one could trust his voice. Sir William sat watching Denys: he had been in the House on the night when Piggott broke down under cross-examination and row after row of members leapt to their feet to cheer the presence of the composed and scornfully unresponsive Parnell. Never since that day had he seen such matter-of-fact absence of emotion in face of moral condemnation or acquittal. Denys sat like a figure carved in marble, pale and tense, but collected, contemptuous and superbly detached. Then the spell was suddenly broken: Daphne had risen to her feet and was beginning her first political speech. Standing erect with the ermine cloak open at the throat she spoke with an ingratiating smile on her face and a note of unaffected wonder in her voice.

"I hope the gentleman who has just spoken won't go for a minute. It's very stupid of me, but I don't quite follow the purpose of his questions. He seems to have made some discovery which everybody else had made long before the election started. At least, everybody else that mattered, the people who signed his nomination paper and all that sort of thing. I don't see what it's all got to do with our candidate. This gentleman talks about rumours going round the constituency, and he wants them confirmed or denied. Really—! What the gentleman needs more than anything else is a free library: any history of Ireland would give him the facts he wants and a full account of the trial. There's no secret about it; it's passed into history. The gentleman should get the book and

read it; it's quite cheap. Mr. Playfair's grandfather was hanged for killing a man in a duel. He fought fair and the other man didn't, but that of course is beside the point—unless perhaps the gentleman thinks there is some merit about stabbing in the back. It's just a matter of taste. And then Mr. Playfair's father. The gentleman should read a good standard book on the South African war. He'll see that Mr. Playfair was fighting for the Boers. Fair fighting again; he took his chance of being captured and tried for treason, and he took his chance of being shot. And he was shot, twice in the leg and once in the arm and once in the shoulder and then just once in the lungs. Of course I don't say that it was the right thing to fight for the Boers; I don't think it was, but anyone's at liberty to think differently, and if they think differently and if they set any store by what they think, I suppose they're free to die for their opinions. The gentleman by the door looks a brave fighter; I wonder how many times he'd wait to be shot? I believe it's a horrid feeling. Well, the gentleman makes these alarming discoveries and he wants a guarantee that our candidate isn't going to play the confidence trick on him. D'you know, I'm afraid I don't exactly know what the confidence trick is. I suppose from the gentleman's speech that it must be a fraud of some kind. Is it? Thank you, I see. You know, that isn't very complimentary to the rest of us. I don't think my grandfather would be a party to any fraud, and I don't think my father would either. Of course I don't count, because I'm not a public man; but before the gentleman goes out and takes our characters away and

tells the electors we are all leagued together to work the—what was it?—oh, the confidence-trick, I should like him to believe that even I shouldn't be sitting on the same platform as Mr. Playfair and canvassing for him if I thought he was the abandoned character that the gentleman seems to imply."

She sat down, still smiling pleasantly, while a low ripple of laughter and applause spread over the hall. Men grouped in masses run more quickly from one extreme to the other than men taken singly. Wilmot hesitated and then left the hall without replying. For the moment the situation was saved: if the individual auditors were given time to think out the rights and wrongs of the position, no one could answer for their judgment. Denys suddenly relaxed his rigid immobility of expression and leant over to Lord Parkstone.

"She's saved us for the moment," he whispered. "Ask Sir William to propose the vote of thanks to the chairman. Don't ask for the usual vote of confidence in me, whatever you do. I don't know if they'd stand it: they don't know, either. Don't give them time to forget Daphne's speech or to think about Wilmot."

Ten minutes later Denys was dreamily handing the ladies of the party into their cars. As he walked down the hall, there had been a half-hearted attempt at applause, prompted more by sympathy than enthusiasm, though when the cheering was taken up by the back benches there was an encouraging sincerity which convinced him that though the present election might be lost, he had won the ear of Labour for a future contest. Apart from that he felt it would have

been better never to have stood for Riversley. The "big speech" had been completely neutralised by Wilmot's exposure, the timid respectability of the Conservative voters would never admit of their supporting him when they had had time to digest the events of the evening. He stood practically where he was standing six months before, and in the barren conflict he had sacrificed more vital energy than he dared calculate.

His reflections were disturbed by the necessity of finding a vacant seat in one of the cars. Lady Parkstone, who had been dining out and therefore had not been present at the meeting, gathered her husband, Daphne, and Maurice into her own car, another was taken up with Denys' agent and three of his most strenuous canvassers, so that he and Sheila were left to take their seats in a small landaulette usually reserved for the use of Maurice's aunt. Denys gave his hand to Sheila, wrapped a rug round her, and sank moodily into his corner.

"We've both got something to thank Daphne for," said Sheila when they had driven in silence for three or four minutes.

"I hope you weren't bored by the meeting," he said with exasperating politeness. "We laid on rather more variety and excitement than usual."

"That didn't prevent me from getting bored," she replied with an obvious yawn. "However, don't let's talk about it. Polling to-morrow, isn't it, or the next day? And then the suspense will be over."

"I don't think we need get in a flutter about the suspense. I'll make you a present of the odd trick

this time, Sheila. The 'odd trick'—that's rather a happy name for it."

"I can win without any odd tricks of that kind, thank you. I suppose you think I put the idea into Wilmot's head."

"Did you?"

"What do you think?"

"You're capable of it, you know, if you thought it would suit your purpose. The first time I saw you I said you'd stick at nothing to get what you wanted, though heaven knows what you want or why you want it. I've never seen any reason to modify that view. Look at the way you're treating Maurice, look at the way Daphne's made a pawn in the game."

"And look at the way poor little Denys is being ill-used. You're really rather delightful, my little friend. I'll tell you a story. There was once an anarchist who wanted to upset society: he proposed to start by blowing up St. Paul's, so he ordered a nice supply of dynamite. Unfortunately the dynamite didn't arrive on the day it had been promised, so our resourceful anarchist brought an action for breach of contract. That's you, Denys, all over. You tell me you're going to have your revenge on all of us because some of our ancestors fell foul of one of your ancestors, and then it's quite a grievance if we stick out our quills and prick your fingers."

"I didn't tell you so."

"No, but I found out. That's what you've really never forgiven."

"You may use what weapons you like against me, but you aren't treating Maurice fairly."

"He shouldn't have laid his unclean hands on Daphne. I'm doing her a service, at any rate. And that disposes of them. Any more complaints? You've still got five minutes or so before we're home. Anyone else I've victimised?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Yourself"

"Me? Poor little Sheila Farling? I must look into this. She's rather a dear, only she's not always appreciated. What's the matter with her?"

Denys hesitated and then plunged boldly into a warning he had been saving up for several days.

"Well, it's just possible that when people see the encouragement you're giving Maurice, and when they know he's engaged to Daphne, and when they hear the engagement's broken off, there will be some spiteful remarks at the expense of your character and designs."

"And you wouldn't like that, would you, Denys?"

"No, I shouldn't!" he burst out.

Sheila sat silent till the car came to a standstill at the door of the house. Then she laid a gentle hand on his knee, and said with a slight quaver in her voice:

"That's the first time in your life you've ever thought of anybody but yourself. You have your good moments. It's all right, I can take care of myself."

"It's *not* the first time, it's *not* all right, you *can't* take care of yourself, otherwise your statement is fairly accurate. Do try to recognise that you're not a law unto yourself; your venomous sex makes the same

venomous remarks about you as about anyone else. Why can't you recognise that ? "

" D'you think I don't ? " she asked bitterly, and then with mocking regret : " Muddle-headed as ever ! Sheila missed a lot by being born a girl. Denys, I'm sorry about to-night, it was a devilish thing to do. You don't really think I told him ? "

" Of course I don't."

" Honour ? Right. Friends."

She touched his hand with the tips of her fingers, jumped out of the car and ran into the hall, where the rest of the party were assembled. Wilmot's speech had thrown a gloom over the spirits of all, and there was no attempt at the usual discussion of prospects and tactics. Daphne's intervention was the topic of the moment, but though all were amazed at rescue being attempted from such a quarter, none dared hope that it would be successful. Denys drew up a chair next to hers and thanked her for the speech.

" I was never so frightened in my life," she confided with unaffected surprise at her own achievement.

" It was a fine finish to all you've done in the election. If I get in I shall have you and you only to thank. You've been my best canvasser and my best speaker. Anybody can make a set speech when they're prepared for it, but to get up on the spur of the moment when everybody else sat tongue-tied . . ."

" I do hope you'll get in," she interrupted, with an obvious desire to leave the subject of her own endeavours.

" Don't build too much on the hope," he answered despondently.

"Even if you don't this time, there'll soon be another seat vacant. Hallo! everyone's going to bed. Good-night, and good luck!"

One by one the guests retired upstairs, until Denys was left alone to finish his cigar and stare into the embers of the dying fire. The butler came to inspect the fastenings of window and door and enquire whether anything more was wanted. Before leaving he placed the evening's mail on a table by Denys' side and mentioned that a messenger had just ridden over with a note which required no answer. Denys took it in his hand, but for the present left it unopened while he followed out his train of thoughts. What were his present position and prospects? What would they have been if oblivion had descended on his mind, wiping out the memory of his grandfather's martyrdom and his own mission, leaving him to shape his own life and follow his own impulses?

As the darkened house settled gradually to silence, his nerves grew tranquil and the old vision gave place to a new one. Temptation, apathy, reaction, be the reason what it might, for the first time in his memory he was dreaming of himself as a man suddenly released from obligation. The first eager steps into forgetfulness were familiar: whenever his mind went back to Oxford and his books, he had played with the idea of what his life might have been made. The fancy had always been dismissed as idle and morally corrupting, now he was too tired to resist it. The changing scene of the evening lingered obstinately for a moment—the passive, silent audience, the outburst of cheering, the heavy, wicked face of Wilmot, the bombshell, the

sudden hush, the shy, unexpected voice of Daphne—then passed away and left him to continue his dream. Into that dream came the memory of a car running swiftly along a frost-bound road, a white half-circle of light blazing on to snow-covered hedges, two voices: he recognised his own, speaking with a petulance that he regretted, and then Sheila's, speaking in a tone he loved to hear, however petulant. The voices softened and grew friendly: then the car stopped, and the lights of the hall, shining through the window, fell on a wistful little face and two large black eyes. There was an expression he had never seen on that or any other face—tenderness, humility, and hopeless resignation; the light had caught her exposing an unknown aspect of her soul. Then the face was hidden as she brushed past him. . . Into the dream came the touch of her fingers on his hand and the sound of a thrilling, eager voice; then the vision materialised into a Sheila of flesh and blood, leaning over the back of his chair in a scarlet silk peignoire, and imploring him to go to bed like a dear, sweet, rational creature. He shivered and came out of his dreams.

"Denys, I've come to make peace. We'll finish the rubber, if you like, in a month's time, but just at the moment we want a—what-do-you-call-it?—armistice, to bury our dead. This [illegible]day: or rather it's Wednesday morning, ow[illegible]o your unseasonable hours: the ball's on Friday, and on Monday Father Time and I are going south. The 'Bird of Time' is fitted out all ready and we're going a trial trip to Toulon. If we like the weather we shall go on for a few days to the Riviera and then home again. We

want you to come with us, Denys. If you're bored, you can go overland home in twenty-four hours, otherwise come back by sea and support me in the Bay. If you like it and we don't find any holes in the 'Bird of Time,' you can come out to the Pacific with us: if not, you can do the other thing. Will you come?"

He threw away the end of his cigar.

"What's the ulterior motive, Sheila?"

She drew up a footstool and seated herself at his feet, clasping her hands round her knees.

"I wonder if there's anything in the whole wide world I could do to make you think well of me. I tell you it's peace between us and you won't believe me. Listen to reason, Denys. Polling's to-morrow: whether you get in or not, the Riversley chapter closes in less than twenty-four hours. Say you're beaten: you can't do anything till another seat becomes vacant, so no time's lost for either of us by your coming abroad. Say you win: well, Daphne will have got you in by her pretty little speech to-night and by her saying she wouldn't have worked for you if she hadn't trusted you. You'll find it a bit hard to drive the Juggernaut Car with that speech of Daphne's to explain away. I told you we both had something to thank her for. And meantime you're looking like the end of the world and I want to avoid an inquest in the house. Is that plain enough?"

"Quite. Why this flattering solicitude about my health?"

"What a fool the boy is! Denys, do you think nobody cares whether you live or die?"

"Yes."

"Fool! Hopeless, unutterable, stupendous fool! I'm sorry, Denys, I had to say it. *I* care, for one, or else I shouldn't be talking to you at this hour—and in these clothes. Do say you will."

"I . . ." He paused.

"Go on."

But Denys had lost the power of speech. His parted lips worked for an instant and then closed in silence; an expression of fear and effort and bewilderment came into his eyes, and his hand worked feebly in the air.

"Go on, Denys. I . . . Say you will. What's the matter?"

"What was I saying?" The words came from a distance and he shivered as he spoke.

"You started 'I,' and then stopped."

"What were you saying?"

"My dear, this is waste of time. I'm not going over the whole of our conversation. Will you come?"

"Where?"

"Denys, aren't you well?"

He got up and stood leaning his head against the mantelpiece. "Some day that will happen when I'm making a public speech, and then I shall be done. How long was I like that, Sheila, not speaking?"

"About three seconds."

"It seemed like three hours. Oh, my God, it is an awful feeling! Your brain suddenly goes, you can't think and you can't speak, and it seems as if it were never going to end. We'll finish whatever we were talking about to-morrow, Sheila; my nerve's gone."

She watched the sudden change with alarm. In less than a minute all the strength had gone out of him, and he stood tremulous and tottering like a child on the verge of tears.

"Take my arm and come slowly. Look here, are you fit to put yourself to bed or shall I wake up Maurice? Right. Here are some letters for you, but they'll keep till the morning. There's one marked 'Urgent.' I don't suppose it's anything."

He took it in silence and glanced at the hasty pencil-scrawl: then he handed it to Sheila. It was from Jack Melbourne: the point of the pencil had been broken in the first line and for once he was too much roused for posturing.

"MY DEAR DENNY" (it ran),

"That swine Wilmot has just asked me to congratulate him on his performance to-night. Of course you know I had no part in it, and if I'd been present at the meeting I'd have thrashed him publicly. My good wishes for your election! They can't help returning you, because you're the only candidate now that I've retired. At least, I think I've retired, but I've got to find out if it's in order for a candidate once nominated to clear out before the poll. If it is, out I clear: if it isn't, you'll find me among your most stalwart supporters, and Head Quarters can say what they like.

"Ever yours,

"JACK M.

"P.S.—A more damnable, cruel trick I've never heard of. J. M."

Sheila handed him back the letter. He pocketed it

with a smile and pitiful, swaggering attempt to kindle the light of battle in his tired, frightened eyes.

"We scored in too much of a hurry," said Sheila calmly, "the odd trick goes to you."

"And the rubber."

"There's another game yet. You're forgetting Daphne's speech."

"It doesn't count now: Jack has wiped out opposition and the game's over."

"I'll leave Daphne to discuss that with you. Anyway I've finished with it and perhaps you'll give me a consolation prize. I like to get my own way, but I do sometimes have other people's interests at heart. Some day you may believe that."

She turned and started up the stairs, weary and crestfallen. Denys watched the slight figure and bent head for a moment and then hurried after her. Suddenly he seemed to be seeing below the mischievous, laughing exterior, penetrating to a heart that was soft and all too easily wounded, and identifying the Sheila that he saw with the Sheila he had fancied in his dream.

"If I could unsay all the beastly things I've said to you since we've been down here together, I'd make you a present of the election and . . . and everything it means to me."

She halted on the stairs and looked at his white, eager face. For a moment there was a strong impulse to throw herself into his arms and crave permission to smoothe out the creases in a lonely and joyless life. Then she saw herself caught in a trap of her own contriving: Maurice would not abandon Daphne until he had convinced himself that Denys was more acceptable

in her eyes; if Daphne was to be liberated and made happy, if Denys was to be the liberator, there was no room for her in the tableau she had so elaborately designed. She took him by the arm and walked by his side to the head of the stairs.

"Some day you'll begin to understand me," she said banteringly. "Sheila may not have a soul to save, but she's feelings to be hurt. Yes, it's all right, you're beginning to see that. Some day you'll remember before you hurt them. But I don't want the election as a present. I told you I'd retired from the game. Let's just be friends; I can be quite nice to people I'm fond of. I look after them and take a lot of trouble with them. And you know you're not fit to look after yourself. I told you that the first day I met you. That's why I want you to come to the Mediterranean with Father Time and me: it would do you good. Think it over and tell me to-morrow, and now go to bed and get some sleep. Good-night."

For two days Denys kept his room, winning sleep with the aid of veronal. On the afternoon of the ball, Maurice, entering on tip-toe, found him awake.

"Feelin' better, old thing?" he asked, sitting down on the foot of the bed. "I've bin in to see you once or twice, but you were sleepin' like the proverbial hog. Look here, touchin' this ball, I'm thinkin' we'd better scratch it; you're not in a fit state to have the house invaded by half the county plus a band. A little brisk work with His Majesty's telegraph and the thing's done."

"It's not to be thought of," said Denys. "I'm coming to it."

No such thing; you're goin' to lie still and lap up milk every two hours till it trickles down the corners of your mouth, and if you give any trouble you'll be strapped down."

"What d'you bet?"

Maurice became reasonable in his own way.

"Look here, everyone knows that Balaam's prize ass wasn't in it with you for obstinacy, but do try to be sane just for a minute. The damned election's over, the damned candidate—meanin' you—is entitled to put M.P. after his damned name; you're lookin' rotten, you're as thin as a clothes-pole and as white as a sheet. God! man, look at your arms! they're like a girl's, and a pretty skinny girl's at that. Yes, you put 'em out of sight. Well, goin' back to our muttons, you've just got to take care of yourself. You're one of the things that matter, you've got a headpiece, not like me, and you're about as over-trained as any ugly brute I've ever seen."

"But I've never felt better in my life," Denys protested.

"Mouldy sort of life you must lead. Honestly you'd better not."

"But it's Daphne's birthday, you seem to forget that. So the ball can't be put off, and if there's a ball going I don't propose to miss it. By the way, there's a case on the dressing-table I want you to give her from me."

"Poor little Daphne!"

"Why?"

"She's been born into the wrong world."

Maurice got up from the bed to inspect the case and

the pendant it contained. He had come into the room with a hazy idea of seeking advice from Denys; reflection showed him that he must depend on himself to work out his own salvation or the salvation Sheila had ordained for him. At the moment he would have bartered his hopes of eternity for an excuse to get away from Riversley before the state birthday dinner and ball.

"It's a wearin' business bein' host," he remarked disconsolately. "People arrivin' by every post, and my future—her ladyship in a temper that'd draw tears from a horse-coper. Wonder what poor old Parkstone did to deserve a wife like that! Jacky Melbourne's comin' for the night, that's one good thing, he'll humble her pride. 'Parently 'our father's' arrangements don't run to givin' Jacky a hot bath after a ball. Hence the honour."

Denys sat up and reached for a dressing-gown.

"Pull up the blinds, Maurice, will you? Hullo, who's been cutting your head for you?"

Maurice's hand went to a star-fish pattern of plaster over the right temple.

"That's a political argument," he said with an appreciative grin. "Sheila an' I took our livers walkin' yesterday, and who should we meet but our red-haired friend? He was wearin' a doggy fur coat, so I gave tongue and shouted: 'Off with the coat, Wilmot!' 'What's the matter?' says he. 'Well, it looks a good coat,' I said, 'it'd be a pity to get it wet, and I propose to pop you in the pond.' Wilmot didn't say much, but he looked nasty. He wouldn't take the coat off though, so I tried to help him and got wiped over

the head for my pains. Good, beefy man, Wilmot, but no knowledge of the Gentle Art. I got right home on the point of his jaw, and while he was thinkin' what a poor, hard place the earth was, I showed him how much cooler and softer he'd find the water by comparison. We were by the Ford, a perfect godsend. In he went, down, down, down: up he came with his hair full of weed, spittin' and swearin'. I don't know what Sheila must have thought. He'd left his stick behind as a little keepsake, and whenever he waded in shore I lammed it down within an inch of his carcase. Didn't hit him, of course, just demonstrated the difficulties of landin'. We must have spent ten minutes dancin' up and down opposite each other. I was in a sweat when we'd done. I bet Wilmot wasn't. Finally he waded through to the other side with the stick hurtlin' after him and pickin' him off in the fleshy part of the neck. I thought I'd killed him."

"You'll find yourself in gaol for that," said Denys encouragingly.

"Where's the evidence?" asked Maurice with unconcern. "Not even a stick or fur coat concealed about my person, not a soul lookin' on bar Sheila, and she's goin' abroad. It was like the dear old days round Mercury."

"What's the time?" asked Denys, getting out of bed. "My watch has stopped."

"Quarter to five. Like some tea?"

"I can hang on till dinner. Well, I must get shaved. Are you going? Don't forget the case for Daphne, and tell her I hope she'll have very many happy returns of the day."

Maurice's despondency returned with the thought of all the evening had in store for him.

"I hope for her sake she won't have any more days like this," he answered darkly.

CHAPTER XI

MAURICE MAKES A DISCREET SPEECH

"Some would know
Why I so
Long still do tarry,
And ask why
Here that I
Live and not marry.
Thus I those
Do oppose:
What man would be
Slave to thral
If at all
He could live free here?"

—HERRICK "HESPERIDES."

"IT'S almost worth reaching years of discretion, to pick up these elegant and expensive trifles, Lady Daphne."

For the first time in his life Jack Melrose had been deceived by the eccentricities of his watch to being dressed a full five minutes before dinner. With the air of a lost soul surveying disconsolately round Paradise, he was occupying himself with a cigarette and affecting an interest in Daphne's coming-of-age presents.

"Have you seen the diamond Lloys gave me? It's the loveliest thing I've ever had. I wish people wouldn't spend so much money on me.

"But why not? There's a great satisfaction in collecting widows' mites. He can't afford it or he

wouldn't have given it you. When I came of age I was given a bible, a silver pencil-case, and a postcard telling me that I was no longer a minor and that all offers of my hand in marriage would be used as evidence against me. Moneylenders' circulars followed in bewildering profusion. Who gave you the pearl dog-collar?"

"Maurice."

"Why has he scratched 'Lethe' inside the clasp?"

"I don't know. Maurice!"

"Don't interrupt him, he's thinking out his speech."

But I want the inscription explained."

Daphne also wanted to avoid the subject of the speech. From the time when her mother visited her in bed to bestow a pecking kiss and a frigid caress, it had been borne in upon her that she was now of full age and [illegible] discretion equal to the task of determining whether her engagement with Maurice was to continue. She had awakened with a feeling of impending [illegible] heavy upon her, and the burden had not been relieved by her mother's unceasing question what—if anything—Maurice had done to diminish her regard for him? By luncheon time she had argued herself into great clarity of thought and extreme discomfort of mind. The engagement had begun at a moment when her feelings were in disorder: he had saved her life at the risk of his own, she was grateful to him, and above all she was glamoured by the sight of danger light-heartedly encountered. By contrast with her own shrinking and sensitive nature Maurice was attractively str

and reassuring. Intellectually he might be commonplace, but the same charge could be brought against most of the young men she met. Since that day what had happened? In tracing the course of the last twelve months she treated herself without pity. Maurice was unchanged: the bluff, good-natured strength and cheery courage which had won her were in no way abated. The change, if change there were, had taken place in herself.

For a while her mind dwelt on the first easy, unfettered conversations with Denys, when something in his manner induced her to pour out her dissatisfaction with the old, useless existence, and she learnt from him to set a value on herself and see vague, visionary aspirations made concrete and practical. In "The Trustees of Posterity" he had found a waggon for her star. With the appearance of the book and the return of its author to Parliament her own usefulness seemed to have evaporated. When he was not by to inspire her, she lost faith in herself and went back to the old attitude of diffidence and self-disparagement. Aspirations, dreams, missions, a wider life—the terms rang hollow: her mother and Maurice misunderstood and doubted them till she began to share their doubt. Somehow they seemed a cloak to cover mere restless discontent, and when she charged Maurice with insensibility, the accusation seemed not quite just; she was keeping something back. To the best of his ability he had humoured her and tried to identify himself with her interests. But his efforts had been robbed of their value and their reward on the day when a brilliant, dark-eyed

Irishman had bewitched her ears and flung an unanswerable challenge at Maurice's feet.

Outside her window the gardeners were sweeping the snow from the terrace. Passively watching them, she recalled the other terrace which she had paced with Denys in the warm summer evenings, greedily drinking chance tales of a life that realised her own impossible dreaming. The diverse past, the crowded present, the boundless future. She saw once again the pale, thin, animated face, the quick smile, the flashing, deep-set eyes; once more she heard the soft, low voice, gathering gradual speed as his subject gripped him. She remembered the growing hush round the table as one guest after another paused to listen to the coining of magical phrase. His words fell like notes of wild harping, now lulling to slumber, now rousing to frenzy. It was an irresistible outpouring: she did not wonder that a tired, indifferent meeting sat spellbound while he spoke, or leapt up with hysterical cheering when he finished. For one, two, three months she had known the joy of working with and for him: she had toiled without misgiving: when he told her that politics for him meant mere lust for personal power, she preferred not to take the warning seriously: the tongue which spoke as his spoke and the hand which had penned the haunting pages of his last book could only be inspired by the single love of truth, the clearly heard call of duty, and the appeal of suffering humanity. That appeal had roused her to a disgust with her empty parasitic existence: or was it only the contrast between a meteor and a clod of clay? Her thoughts rushed back and occupied

the position she had been defending against their attack; she was punishing Maurice because she was tired of him, and disguising her motives under the cloak of disinterested duty.

"Maurice, I want you to tell me why you scratched 'Lethe' on the clasp of this collar."

Jack Melbourne had wandered away to the fire and they were standing alone at the far end of the room. Maurice hesitated and then lowered his voice.

"Lethe: it means forgetfulness, Daphne. I want you to forget what a beast I am."

"But, Maurice!" She looked up to find he had moved away. The inscription had been the subject of controversy between Sheila, who had put the idea in his mind, Maurice, who was uncertain whether Lethe or Acheron was intended, and Denys, who knew nothing of Maurice's motives but had been called in on a point of scholarship as a man who knew the Greek characters and could, if necessary, rough them out on paper for Maurice to copy. Ever since he had scratched them there, Maurice had been regretting his action, or rather the whole conspiracy of which this was part.

During the past two months he had been brought into daily contact with a sympathetic, soft-voiced Sheila who no longer laughed at him or despised him, but talked interestedly and intelligently on the subjects near his heart: cubbing and racing, the reason why Collison had given up the hounds, and his own prospects in taking over the vacant mastership. He felt he had grown older in those eight weeks: previously he had been preoccupied with the idea of marrying

Daphne, but he now recognised that there could quite well be other girls as attractive, and far more human, girls who were not obsessed with the idea of sitting on Distress Committees, interfering with the poor and leaving the trail of their philanthropy athwart every legitimate scent. Daphne was . . . oh yes, Daphne was all right, and he was very fond of her, but marriage was a serious business, devilish serious. When he married her . . . that is to say, if he married her, he'd do his best to fall in with her strange views—up to a point. A man had himself to consider, too, and as long as his tastes were perfectly harmless and creditable, there was no sort of reason why a man should live in an atmosphere of permanent disapproval and allow himself to be headed off all the innocent amusements a man might fancy. Marriage on those terms simply wasn't worth having.

And to move the previous question, was it necessary to marry at all? Denys seemed to live an extraordinarily full and satisfactory life as a bachelor: Maurice had seen that when he was staying at Buckingham Gate; he knew many worse bachelor quarters than that flat, and he knew many worse models than Denys. At the same time it would probably be rather a blow to Daphne, who seemed as fond of him as ever. He had tested that only a few days before by asking her point blank if she wished to break off the engagement, and she had said "No." In a moment of contrition he had scratched "Lethe" on the clasp of the necklace and hoped in this way to make his peace in advance; anyhow, it would break the shock. A man owed

something to himself, had to think of his own future. After dinner that night it was expected that he would make a speech proposing Daphne's health and giving publicity to their unofficial engagement, and the next day's papers would contain the announcement and make retreat well-nigh impossible. Maurice was resolved to make his speech: he thought there might be singularly little "copy" in it for the next day's Court Circular.

As he sauntered moodily round the room Denys came in and was made the target for an onslaught of inquiries and congratulations. When the smoke had cleared away, Sheila took him aside.

"Do you love me, Denys?" she asked.

"In that dress no one could help it."

The dress in question was white silk, with a green tunic bordered with fur. In the matter of clothes Sheila's time was spent in eclipsing her own records.

"No, but really?"

"What do you want me to do for you?"

"Talk, I want you to talk. You're taking me in and I shall be simply speechless. So will everybody else. There's enough lightning about to strike us all into our graves. Aunt Margaret's so jumpy I daren't go near her, Daphne's nearly in tears, and Maurice is like a man who's been summoned by the last trump to the Judgment-seat and just remembers he's forgotten to put his tie on. My dear, I'm nearly crying myself."

She was strangely excited and unlike herself, talking tremulously and glancing nervously about her. Denys

wondered anxiously in what new devilry he was being involved.

"What's the matter with everyone?"

"Oh, I don't know. At least I do . . ."

Denys lowered his voice. "Has Maurice . . ." he began, looking at Daphne.

"Hush! no. He hasn't had time: people arriving all day and that sort of thing."

As Maurice himself had complained that afternoon, a host's duties are wearing. He had been so preoccupied with hospitality that his guests had hardly seen him. Lady Parkstone, after breakfasting in her room, descended with determination in every line of her hard countenance. She wanted to see Maurice; just a word, she wouldn't keep him. It appeared that Maurice was in consultation with the head-gardener on the subject of the evening's decorations. At luncheon—when a host might reasonably be expected—his chair was empty. Sheila made lame reference to a man who had wired changing his train. Maurice, it seemed, had driven in—quite unnecessarily—to meet a train which was timed for one-thirty and did not arrive till four. For reasons best known to himself he had driven into the stable-yard and gone instantly to ground in Denys' bedroom. Lady Parkstone felt that she, and possibly in a vague, unimportant degree Daphne also, were not being fairly treated. The suspense tried her temper. Daphne waited fatalistically; her meeting with Maurice had told her nothing: six hurried words of good wishes, a morocco case wrapped in tissue paper—and he had disappeared as quickly as he had come.

"I suppose he'll make the announcement to-night," said Denys.

"Oh, sufficient for the day!" said Sheila impatiently. "Dinner's the first thing to be faced. If you—or someone—don't get things going we shall all go up in blue smoke."

"I'll do what I can, but I decline to be mixed up in any of your machinations, and if you've any regard for the advice of anyone you'll throw them overboard and let destiny take its course. Are you going to let me take you in to supper?"

"Yes, if I'm alive by then."

"And dance with you?"

"Afterwards, yes. I shall be busy till supper."

"I know what that means."

"You don't. You simply can't imagine how I hate it, but it's got to be done. Kismet, Fate, I can't help myself."

"I never thought I should hear that from you," said Denys quietly.

"I'm fighting for the living; it's for Daphne. Look at her, doesn't she look lovely to-night? Isn't she worth it, Denys? I adore her more than any soul on earth—almost," she added, looking defiantly up at him.

"Sheila Farling always excepted."

"Oh, Denys, do try and believe I'm not thinking of myself to-night."

The dinner began in an atmosphere of timid reserve which fulfilled Sheila's anticipations; conventional references to the flowers on the table, conscientious allusions to the election; then the numbing chill

of Lady Parkstone's presence communicated itself to her neighbours and spread down the room. Conversation had fallen to a furtive whisper by the time the oysters were removed, and the soup was eaten to its own accompaniment. At last Jack Melbourne roused himself to the occasion. Accepting the expression of disapproval on Lady Parkstone's face as a challenge, he embarked on a course of paradox and iconoclasm calculated to attract a storm of dissent to the head of the speaker. Considering what opinion would be least expected of him, he would fling it at the head of his audience with the weight of unquestioned dogma. Sir William abetted him from the other side of the table; Lord Parkstone and a dull-witted political agent took it by turns to be the foil.

"Every advance in civilisation has been inspired by an unjustifiable motive," said Melbourne when the conversation turned that way.

"I think it would be possible to find a good many exceptions to that theory," said Lady Parkstone ponderously.

"Possible, but not easy," cut in Sir William encouragingly.

"Oh, come, come!" objected the agent, "the exceptions outnumber the instances; the theory won't bear examination. Take railways."

"Railways won't bear examination," said Melbourne. "What was the beginning of English railway enterprise?"

"The line from Stockton to Darlington, I believe," said the agent with modest omniscience.

"Exactly," agreed Melbourne, who heard the fact for the first time, "a line built to facilitate entry into Stockton is an enterprise inspired by an unworthy motive."

"Any desire to get away from Darlington is praiseworthy," suggested Sir William. "It is a question of mixed motives, I should rather say."

Old Mr. Collison leant across the table and addressed Denys.

"I must congratulate you on your election, Playfair, but, upon my soul, this new Toryism frightens me. I confess I don't understand it. You'd have been court-martialled for Radicalism in my young days."

"It's only by outbidding the Radicals that you can get the ear of Labour," said Sir William. "Politics in this country reduce themselves ultimately to addition and subtraction. Why force them to the ultima ratio in which you are going to be submerged, when you can win over a majority of converts and help to do the submerging?"

"I know. Randolph tried that and failed I told him he would fail."

"Randolph never carried his party with him. We shall fail again if we can't do that."

"But what do we stand to gain? Robbery by a friend is just as unpleasant as robbery by an enemy. I don't like being flayed, and all you new Tories with your 'Trustees' Posterity' are going to flay me just as much as the old Radicals and Socialists I've been abusing for a generation."

"We shan't skin you as thoroughly," said Sir William soothingly.

"Why not leave things as they are?" Collison leant forward and sawed the air with his forefinger. "I suppose I'm an Individualist, I've always held that a man must work out his own salvation. This book of yours, Parkstone, makes a man something between a convict and a permanent invalid. The state, meaning by that a small army of inspectors generalled by a parcel of boys in a Government Office, takes a man and nursemaids him. 'Put out your tongue. Only so-so. We'll feed you on slops, and if you're a good boy we'll certify you fit for marriage, provided your wife comes up to the standard in Schedule Z. Now let's look at your clothes. Not hygienic. Well, well. Go to work. Not more than eight hours, proper holidays; we'll teach you how to employ 'em properly. We'll inspect the factory, and inspect the house you live in, and inspect your clothes, and inspect your children. We'll inspect you out of existence, but we'll make a healthy citizen of you.' What sort of a lame duck will you get with all your inspection? And this comes from the Tory party, who've always rather thought a man might call his soul his own, or any rate go to the devil in his own way!"

"With the result that you see in every slum," said Lord Parkstone.

"We did get the survival of the fittest."

"Did we?" Sir William looked round the table at the fittest who had survived. "The survival of the fittest only means the survival of the people with best chance of surviving: you, I, all of us here, the people who had to put out our tongues and be examined by the family doctor as a matter of course, and weren't

overworked, or underfed, and were always decently housed. No wonder we start life with a better chance of surviving! It's no merit of our own."

"It's a merit of our fathers. If they hadn't had the strength to keep from going to pieces, we shouldn't have had the start we did."

"Then a man doesn't really work out his own salvation; his father starts working it out for him?"

"To some extent. And the sins of the father are visited on the children."

"That's an argument the children won't swallow, and it's the children, the present generation in politics, we have to deal with."

"You can't treat the children like lay figures, apart from the antecedents and surroundings."

"You can alter the surroundings: that's what 'The Trustees' shows you how to do."

Collison smiled grimly. "'The Trustees' was tactfully silent on the point where the money was coming from."

"Money comes from where money is."

"Me? The result's the same, whether you call yourselves Tories or Radicals or Socialists. I can't see why you won't leave things alone; I don't like this stirring of class against class. Don't interfere with me and I won't interfere with you."

For Denys' ears that philosophy never lost its ingenuous freshness. Now in one form, now in another, he had heard it so often and had learned so much from it. With such a frame of mind to contend against he realised the impossibility of ever saving his present allies from ultimate annihilation: they were ci-devants,

Bourbons. He saw, further, the vulnerable spot in their armour for the day when he was turned over to the enemy's camp. And he saw in their lack of imagination and inaccessibility to new ideas the explanation of his grandfather's tragedy.

"Would you hold those 'live and let live' views on eighteen shillings a week with a wife and family to bring up in a slum, Mr. Collison?" he asked.

"Possibly not, but though I don't live in a slum, believe me, I don't like to see other people living there. We bigoted old Tories have done something to make things easier for people less happily placed than ourselves. It was expected of us, and we did it freely and ungrudgingly. What I can't stand is the new idea that other people have got a *right* to our property."

Lord Parkstone took up the running.

"In the modern state your rights are limited to what the community in its wisdom or folly allows you. The majority in the state consists of the relatively less-possessing; any property that the relatively more-possessing may retain is retained precariously. It can be voted away at an hour's notice: it *will* be largely voted away as soon as the democracy realises its strength."

Sir William helped himself to a salted almond and pointed the moral.

"Merely as a measure of insurance, Collison, you should be glad to see Denys returned."

Collison grunted and retired from the conversation.

"I think we should look at the question from a different point of view," said Lord Parkstone, with a tardy attempt to rescue his ideals. "Leave the aspect

of insurance out of account and try to keep abreast of the times. When you read the history of the Conservative Party in this country, you're reading the history of a party that has always been in the wrong. With a few creditable exceptions we've always opposed and our opposition has always been broken down in the long run. That is not an encouraging prospect. I don't like to think that any part I may play in shaping the destinies of the country will be dismissed in twenty years' time as part of a blind, obstinate opposition—for—opposition's sake that hadn't even the merit of being successful."

"Isn't it time we got back to first principles?" asked the agent. "I take it that the duty of a Conservative Party is to conserve. We moderate, we don't obstruct. When an electrician turns a two-hundred volt current into a hundred volt lamp, the lamp is burnt out unless a resistance is put in. You don't blame the resistance for keeping the lamp on short supplies. It's the same in politics."

Lord Parkstone weighed the justice of the comparison. Then he said:

"I don't like your simile. In the one case you've got an ascertained force running through a filament of ascertained strength, and to avert a result which you have learnt by experience always takes place, you interpose a resistance of ascertained power. In the other case . . ."

"You are dealing with a force which has never been tested or measured. You want a power of resistance equal to all emergencies."

"No, you want to discover the nature of the

force before you decide if a resistance is necessary. You never try to find that out. You resist by instinct, out of sheer fright. The experimenters get squeezed out of the party, and the result is what I've described; we're written down as obstructionists. Look at the last century! I leave out the franchise question, but we were wrong over Catholic Emancipation, wrong over the Corn Laws, wrong over most of the Liberal Budgets, wrong over Ireland and South Africa. We defended an impossible House of Lords, we starved education. It's a melancholy record: do you wonder that the democracy mistrusts us?"

Jack Melbourne felt he had been long enough out of the conversation.

"There's only one thing worse than a record of failure," he broke in, "and that's a record of success. My party, my late party, I should say—we've retired from political life for the present—my late party's always right wherever yours has been wrong. Every thing that you anathematised we hailed as the dawn of a fresh era of enlightenment. Where has it led us? To an Independent Labour Party which brackets us as fellow-conspirators and distinguishes us Radicals by calling us hypocrites. It's no use trying to be conducive or inspire confidence, you only cheapen yourself. A man remembers you if you insult him or borrow money from him, not if you lend it. Unless you're inaccessible and rude, nobody respects you. Look at our record! We promised the millennium with every Reform Bill we introduced, we promised it again in a free golden age

of laissez faire, we promised it when we smashed the lords' veto. On an average we promise it not less than three times a week."

Sir William turned to Collison.

"You've heard both parties at their examination in bankruptcy. Don't you think there's room for a new party which aims at understanding this all-powerful democracy?"

Collison traced a deliberate pattern with his fork on the table-cloth.

"A man can learn something about horses and he can study the workings of a dog's mind, but the older I get the less I believe an Englishman of one social rank can understand the feelings and the point of view of a man in any other. Frankly, I don't understand your democracy: I see it as a restless, rapacious mob which doesn't grasp the elementary distinction between meum and tuum. Discontented, which is healthy enough, but always wanting to drag me down to its level instead of rising to mine. Frankly, it doesn't understand me: it sees me as a luxurious encumbrance sitting tight on wealth I haven't earned and don't deserve to keep. Where will you find the pair of spectacles to suit both our sights?"

"Dizzy found them," said Sir William. "His outlook was wide enough to see specks even in a millennium. It was no mean feat to preach Empire and Young England to Cobden and the school of laissez faire."

"Ye-es." Collison spoke reflectively. "I concede you Dizzy. And he was an alien."

The conversation had been monopolised by a few speakers on both sides in the middle of the table: their neighbours had been well content to listen and be spared the necessity of joining in. Lady Parkstone at one end and Maurice at the other had their own thoughts to occupy them: Sheila and those of the house-party who had lived through the strain and indefinable oppression of the day luxuriated in an almost incredible relief. Then, with admirable intention and singular want of tact, Lord Parkstone dammed the gentle stream.

"Really, you know, we owe an apology to the ladies," he said. "We've been getting frightfully political."

"It's been very interesting," said Mrs. Collison, bravely, but without conviction.

The early uncomfortable silence returned. The men had been thrown out of their stride and each waited for the other to set the pace. Sheila turned half-face to Denys and whispered, "Now!"

He looked across to Collison.

"I suppose it's a paradox, but I sometimes think that only an alien has the detachment to understand English politics. On the principle that a doctor does not prescribe for his own children." Daphne looked up: he had been sitting almost silent till the mention of Disraeli's name unloosed his tongue: now he began to talk as she loved to hear him. Opening diffidently and with full allowance for objections, he gained vehemence as his theme developed. The subject was lifted at once out of the crude generalisations and wearisome commonplaces of political

argument: it was treated with a scholar's judgment and knowledge and a philosopher's insight: with something, too, of a prophet's fervour. Sheila listened, but with the misgiving which always assailed her when she saw him talking for conquest: he was holding his audience in thraldom and pledging them to his support. Some of the older men had known Disraeli in later life and were struck by Denys' penetration into that subtle, mystic mind. He was treating the struggle for power as if it had personal application to himself, claiming that as aliens alone understood domestic politics, they alone should be entrusted with their control. He too was an alien, an Irishman. Gathering ammunition from Collison's and Lord Parkstone's admissions of failure, he instanced the age-long misgovernment of Ireland, and with the memory of Wilmot's speech fresh in their minds, some at least of his audience felt that their unimaginative lack of sympathy had been responsible for the earlier tragedy, and that they owed it to Denys to wipe out the memory of the past. Sheila alone saw in the gentle reproof ominous warning of future vengeance. It is easier to hold a public meeting than a dinner-table: the first has only to remember not to shuffle its feet; the second has to forget to eat. Denys held them until the depression of the day had once more been forgotten; then with a smiling apology for monopolising the conversation, he broke the spell and turned to Sheila with the whispered question whether he had sufficiently obeyed his instructions and taken the minds of the party off Maurice's impending speech. There

was something cynically defiant in his conscious ability to charm the ears of his hearers at will, and she only replied with a nod. Sir William murmured to his neighbour that Denys would go far in politics.

"Have you any idea where he will stop?" asked Collison, sceptical and unconvinced.

Dessert had come to an end and the cigars had been handed round by the time the political discussion flickered to extinction. The ladies were waiting for Lady Parkstone to give the signal for retirement, the men talked monosyllabically until the time should come for a change of position and the opening of new conversational suits. Then an expectant silence fell upon the table, and one pair of eyes after another turned in the direction of Maurice Weybrook. Denys took the opportunity of studying the expression on his neighbours' faces. Daphne was sitting with her eyes turned to her lap, nervously fingering the hem of her napkin; Sheila was looking at Maurice with a slight smile born of confidence or perhaps of despair; Lady Parkstone struggled with the self-consciousness of one who anticipates panegyric and yet has to affect surprise; her husband fidgeted unemotionally with a pair of nut-crackers. Anxiety struggled with resignation on Sir William's face; Melbourne was apprehensive of emotion and undisguisedly bored; the other guests knew nothing of the turn Maurice's speech was expected to take, and could only imitate the dumb expectancy of the initiated. They were merely conscious of an uncomfortable tension which was at length broken when Maurice scrambled to his feet

and stood waiting for the dessert-knives to cease their tattoo of encouragement.

"Speech!" called Melbourne as the pause lengthened unduly.

"God, no! I'm not going to make a speech." He spoke a little thickly and his face was flushed a brighter red than the normal. "I should have thought you'd had all the speeches you wanted these last few days. Meanin' no disrespect to you, Denys, old son," he added with affability. "Ladies and gentlemen, before we split up to smoke and do whatever the ladies *do* do when we're smokin', I want to propose two toasts. First of all, there's Daphne, it's her birthday and her comin'-of-age." He paused and caught Sheila's eye, then went quickly on: "And then there's Denys, our new member, and a jolly creditable member too. You know all about 'em both, so I needn't tell you, and you see I'm no great shakes at speech-makin', so the less you have of it, the better you'll like it, I'm thinkin'. Ladies and gentlemen! Lady Daphne Grayling and Mr. Denys Playfair, M.P. Daphne, here's to us! Denys, I looks towards you."

For an instant the silence of stupefaction reigned over half the room. Then Sheila rose up, pushed her chair quietly back, and raised her glass.

"Dear old Daphne," she said with affectionate deliberation. "Many, many happy returns of the day! Denys, the best of luck! And don't forget to invite me to your first reception in Downing Street."

The toast was taken up first by those guests who had expected nothing and were surprised by nothing. Then the more intimate friends and members of the

family joined in, until Daphne and Denys alone remained seated, bowing their acknowledgments. At length, after a half-hearted attempt on the part of the political agent to make Daphne return thanks, Lady Parkstone rustled out of her chair and prepared to convoy her charges to the drawing-room.

Sir William moved into the seat vacated by Sheila, and set himself to head the conversation off any discussion of Maurice's behaviour.

"I was greatly interested, Denys, by what you were saying about Dizzy," he began in clear and penetrating tones. "I remember once—I must have been quite a young man at the time—I was staying with him at Hughenden, and he told me . . ."

CHAPTER XII

MAURICE MAKES A LESS DISCREET SPEECH

" Answer me, Trilby ! "
" God forgive me, yes ! "
DU MAURIER : " TRILBY."

" AREN'T you taking this one, Lady Daphne?" asked Jack Melbourne as he arranged his button-hole and cooled himself in the draught of an electric fan playing over a draped ice-block. Like an Israelite spy, he had paid a preliminary visit to the supper-room and returned to report a land flowing with milk and honey. " If not, may I have it ? "

" I'm supposed to be dancing this with Maurice, only I don't know where he is. I think I'd better give him a moment or two longer, if you don't mind ; he's taking me in to supper."

" Well, let me be useful and find him for you. Denys, will you see where Maurice is ? He's keeping Lady Daphne waiting ! " Having demonstrated his powers of vicarious assistance, Jack produced a cigarette case and prepared to get up strength and appetite for a serious attack on the supper.

" Have you seen anything of Sheila ? " asked Denys as he joined them. " I'm due for supper with her, and she's disappeared from the face of the earth."

"Find one and you'll find both," said Jack, "they went into hiding about half an hour ago. In the perfect state hunting-men won't be allowed in the same room as people who can dance: they make a point of following the line of most resistance. Look at the way that fellow takes his jumps! C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas le valse. Now he's going to take the 'cello. He's down! No, he isn't, only a long stagger. I expect Maurice and Miss Farling are binding up each other's wounds; they were cannoned by that spirited boy over there, to my certain knowledge. Shouldn't be surprised if he savaged them into the bargain. If I find them I'll send them along to you."

"May I have this with you till they turn up, Daphne?" asked Denys when they were alone. "It's no good looking for them, because I've tried every conceivable place, so I suggest we give them till the end of this waltz, and if they haven't turned up by then you must let me take you down."

As they began to dance Denys recalled the question which Sheila had asked before dinner: "Isn't she worth it? Doesn't she look lovely to-night?" He could answer that question now: he had never seen her look more beautiful or more unhappy. She was dressed in white, and the absence of colour seemed to intensify the pallor of her face and enrich the deep brown of her hair by contrast. The large grave eyes were thoughtful and unwontedly troubled: the anticipation of some unknown disaster had bathed them in shadow and dimmed their lustre. He noticed with surprise that the only jewellery she wore was the pendant he had given her that afternoon, and the

sight filled him with disturbing wonder and uncertainty. He was as far as ever from being able to define his feelings towards her. Down in Devonshire that summer he had been captivated by her pre-Raphaelite beauty, flattered by the interest and admiration she had shown for his work; above all, roused to a sympathetic pity by her loneliness and monotony of existence. He had awakened one day to the consciousness that he was weakening, softening, growing tender—behind his friend Maurice's back, and while the informal engagement was still unbroken. He had been glad that the engagement was still there to keep him true to his life's work. When, despite his intention of remaining neutral and leaving her to deal with the engagement unadvised, he had found himself forced to advise her, Lady Parkstone's entry into the library had saved him for the service of his vision, and spared him the necessity of deciding what to do if the engagement were abortive. He had been within sight of a crisis. He felt sure that he would have asked her to marry him. The unreality of his crusade would have been overpowering, his penniless condition would have been forgotten. It was more than possible that she would have accepted him; she was one of those who give everything, and he could offer no repayment, even in love. As they danced he was conscious that the arm round her waist was holding her loosely, almost timidly; her left hand rested lightly on his shoulder, he barely touched the finger-tips of her right hand. The attitude was symbolical; he could offer her admiration, worship, devotion, but not love. No other woman had ever impressed him so deeply

with her own purity and goodness, or made him feel so mean and small beside her. He was unwilling to lay hands on her for fear of breaking, spoiling, or defiling. Then the orchestra slowed their time and his mind was recalled from its wanderings by her voice.

"I haven't had a word with you all day," she said as they walked through the hall towards the supper-room. "I want to talk about the election and congratulate you. I haven't done that properly yet." The admission was an unconscious tribute to Lady Parkstone's adroitness in keeping them apart.

"And I haven't thanked you for getting me in."

"I did enjoy it. I wonder if you're as pleased as I am? I don't suppose you are, because it's only one step for you, but it was my only opportunity of striking a blow, and if nothing had come of it I should only have had a failure to look back on—afterwards."

"What about this table?" asked Denys. He did not want to dwell, or allow Daphne to dwell, on what "afterwards" meant to her.

"Denys, you'll have to start very quietly and patiently."

"I'm going to. Your grandfather is taking me abroad with him next week to recover from the election."

"Was it a great strain? I suppose it must have been; you're looking awfully pulled down. But when you get back you'll have to start quietly: you've frightened people rather, first of all with the book, and then with one or two of the speeches. You heard

Mr. Collison at dinner, and a lot of people have said the same thing."

Denys listened in silence and presently she went on:

"So many people—adventurers they are—take up politics just for what they can get out of it. Granddad says you'll have to be careful not to be confused with them. He had rather a struggle to get you adopted as candidate and there was a lot of opposition in the constituency. They said it was selling the pass, and pandering to the Labour Party, and why not run a Socialist candidate without more ado? I don't want to lecture you, but it would be such a pity if you started too violently and forfeited everybody's confidence."

"I know, but I question if it's possible to keep the confidence of an old Tory like Collison and the support of Labour; if one has to go, it will be Collison. He has wealth and position and influence, and he's uncommonly useful as a supporter, but as a voter he's almost powerless. The strength lies with Labour."

"But a greater strength lies with a union of forces."

"If you can keep them united. I'm addressing a big meeting in South London on Sunday night; it will be a test case. We shall see from Monday's newspapers how I've managed to hold the balance."

"Hold it even, Denys; it means so much to—to all your friends. There's no need for hurry, you've got your whole life before you."

"Yes, but one never knows how long that will be," said Denys, with the memory of his breakdown on the night of the last meeting and the consciousness that

he had been torn and stifled by fits of coughing every day since the early spring.

Their conversation turned to the cruise in the Pacific which Sheila was going to take in her grandfather's yacht, and they sat discussing it until supper was over and Denys had finished his second cigarette.

"I suppose we ought to be getting back to the ball-room," said Daphne. "There's still no sign of our lost partners."

"If they aren't in the ball-room you'll have to let me go on dancing with you."

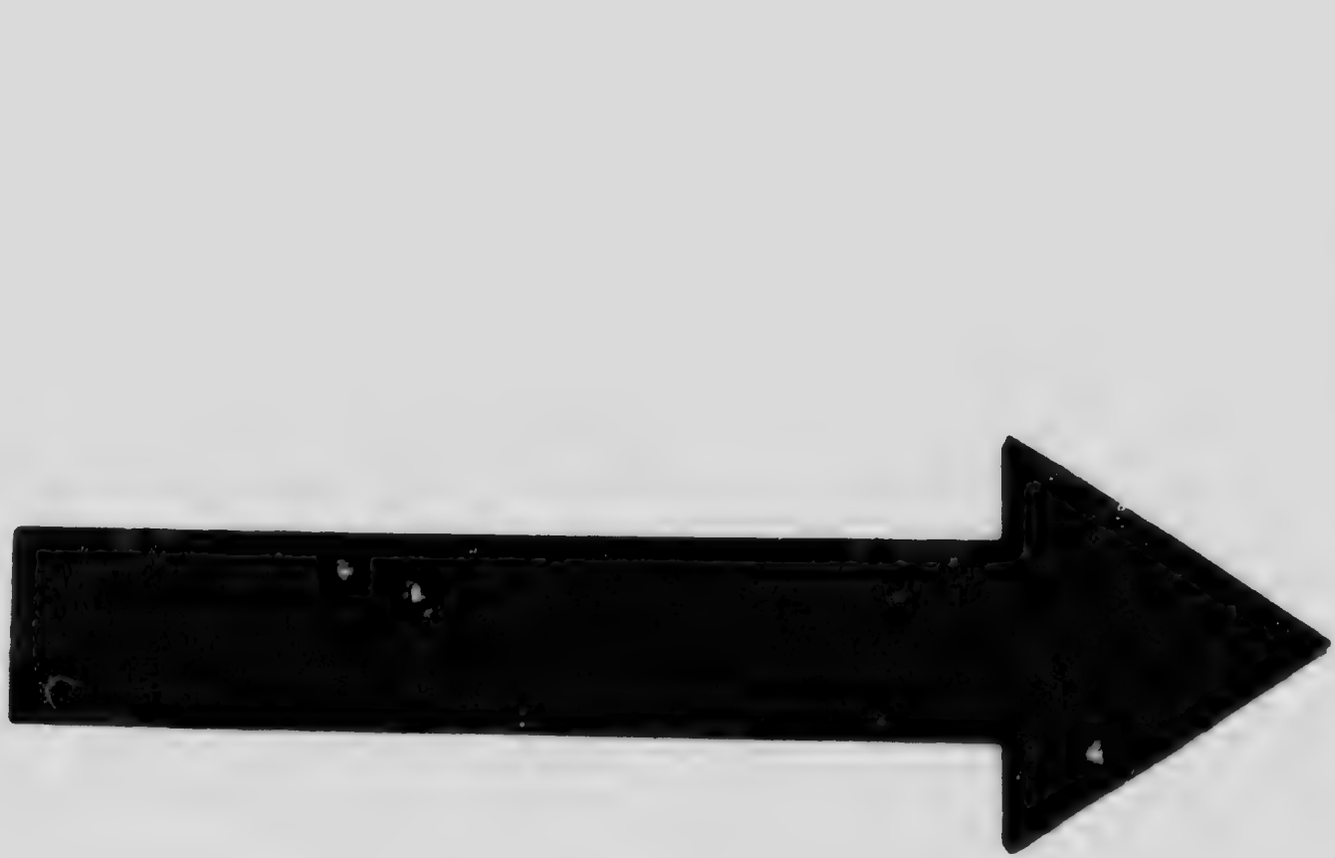
At the door of the supper-room they fell in at the rear of a returning satisfied army headed by Sir William and Mrs. Collison. Lady Parkstone followed with her husband, and behind them walked an undistinguished miscellany of dowagers.

"Does Badstow still go in for orchids?" asked Sir William as they approached a conservatory door.

"I haven't seen them since the early summer," said Mrs. Collison, "but he had a wonderful show then. If you're interested in them, we might go back to the ball-room through the conservatory."

"If the door's not locked," said Sir William. "My word, it's hot in here!" he added, turning the handle. "Margaret, we're going to look at Badstow's orchids. Get inside quickly if you're coming; we mustn't let the heat out."

Lady Parkstone, Mr. Collison, two dowagers, Daphne, Denys, Melbourne and his partner and Lord Parkstone accepted the invitation, and Sir William closed the door. The conservatory ran round two sides of the house, first as a long carpeted corridor,



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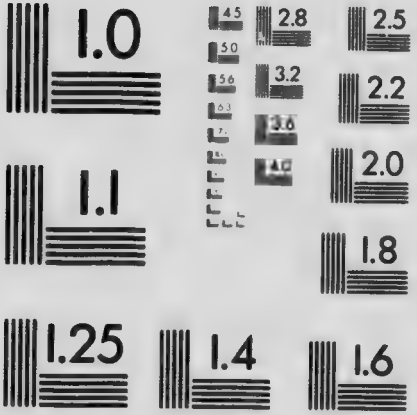

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with staging both sides rising tier above tier to a height of ten or twelve feet: then it turned the corner of the house and broadened into a square winter garden with dwarf orange trees ranged in tubs round the walls. An oblong bath had been sunk into the mosaic pavement, and a slender fountain, copied from the Alcazar, gave forth the gently restful sound of ceaselessly splashing water. Two or three chairs and a divan were distributed under the towering palms, and there was a Spanish inlaid table on which Lord Badstow sometimes took his coffee. For the night of the dance the far door communicating with the ball-room had been locked, and the use of the conservatory interdicted out of consideration for the orchids.

Sir William and his followers walked noiselessly down the corridor; their footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet. The finest of the blooms were over and called for no outburst of admiration. Then the whole party rounded the corner and came to a sudden standstill. On the far side of the bath, and with their backs turned to the corridor, sat Sheila and Maurice, engaged in earnest conversation. One chair sufficed for their requirements, as Maurice had elected to balance himself on the arm to give an effect of greater fervour to his words. What those words were none of the invaders ever knew, but they were at liberty to draw their own conclusions from Sheila's reply.

"This is all very fine, Maurice," she remarked in accents of amusement, "but you seem to have conveniently forgotten that you're engaged to Daphne all the while."

Maurice grunted and leant still further into the body of the chair.

"I was hidin' in the smokin'-room to-day, to get out of her ladyship's claws, when I came across a book that rather fits the case. I've forgotten the party's name that wrote it, but he was uncommon pithy in places. 'In matrimony to hesitate is often to be saved,' or somethin' of the kind. I said, 'Maurice, young fellow my lad, that's you!' when I read it."

Sheila replied with a ripple of laughter in which he joined: then suddenly the laugh froze on his lips as a half-heard sound behind them caused him to turn round and face the tragic countenances of the orchid-hunters. For a moment there was silence; then Sheila turned to see what had struck Maurice suddenly dumb. The variety in facial expression was bewildering. First of all came Lady Parkstone with burning eyes and set mouth, baffled rage deeply imprinted in every rigid line, then Sir William and Lord Parkstone, helplessly amazed, then Daphne with an expression of incredulous horror. Denys stood in the background, contemptuous and angry. Jack Melbourne pressed forward with a look of eager and undisguised delight. Mrs. Collison and the dowagers were uncertain whether to be shocked or amused.

Sheila glanced rapidly from face to face and then nerved herself for an effort. It was an occasion for sheer audacity.

"You don't mean to say you've all finished supper," she said with a smile of untroubled innocence. "Denys, I must apologise for cutting you, we had no idea it

was so late. Come along, Maurice, and get me something to eat before it's all gone. I won't be longer than I can help, Denys."

She rose with a leisurely unconcern that was superb. The sunk bath still divided her from her aunt, but Denys felt he could not answer for Lady Parkstone's self-control when once Sheila came within reach. By way of creating a diversion he turned to Daphne, remarking:

"I fancy the far door's locked; we shall have to go back the way we came."

Two hours later the ball came to an end. The bursting of the storm-cloud had been delayed, as Sheila and Maurice had found it prudent not to appear in public again; but the atmosphere was highly charged, the scene in the conservatory was hungrily discussed in tittering whispers between the dances, and Melbourne brought all the detailed knowledge of the eye-witness to the aid of the imaginative and libellous raconteur. Every embellishment of the story gave a further twist to the rack on which Sheila's reputation lay stretched. For the rest of the night Daphne and Denys were left to dance together unmolested. As they left the conservatory he had heard a dry, strangled sob and the words, "Sheila, oh, anybody but Sheila!" and he was filled with the same impotent wrath that comes over a man who is forced helplessly to watch the ill-treatment of a beautiful dumb animal. She was too much overcome with the shock and the humiliation to say more than a few words. Denys was too deeply touched by her suffering to attempt consolation. As they danced he could feel her whole body trembling, she

clung to him for comfort or support and her head drooped on his shoulder, brushing his cheek with her hair, in the extremity of weariness and shame. Mechanically she watched the last guests gulping hot soup, muffling themselves in coats and scarves, lighting cigarettes and packing themselves into their cars. Then with an effort she regained her normal voice, and said good-night to Denys at the foot of the stairs.

"I don't know if I shall see you in the morning, Denys, so I'll say good-bye now. Good-night—and good-bye."

"Good-night, Daphne." He stood still holding her hand and struggling with an impulse which gripped and terrified him. He was being urged to say something he did not mean, something he would ever afterwards regret, something that was for the moment irresistible. He could not leave her without another word; the large, wistful brown eyes would not close that night, and when morning came they would look out on an inhospitable world wherein her friend had failed her when everything had conspired to make his assistance possible, easy, and welcome. There was a gentle effort to withdraw the hand he was holding and he looked up to find her gazing at him in wonder. Then with his eyes open to the madness of his action, he ceased to struggle and listened passively to a voice which issued from his lips but spoke words he would have given his life to keep back.

"Good-night . . . But we needn't say good-bye, need we? Not now. It's a horrid, cruel word, Daphne; don't let's use it."

Her eyes remained fixed on his for the moment of dawning consciousness: then her left hand stole up to her throat and at last there came a little cry between laughter and tears.

"Oh, Denys, do you mean it?"

"Of course I do, for ever and ever."

A party of men headed by Jack crossed the hall en route for the supper-room. Daphne held out her hand to Denys as they passed, then turned and ran up the stairs, leaving him to walk dazedly into the library.

. . . . .

"Oysters always make me feel very religious," said Jack Melbourne to the men of the house-party whom he was regaling with a final supper and an unceasing discourse. "It's only when you've eaten a couple of dozen that you appreciate the truth of the saying, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' Denys, come and have beer and devilled bones. Ordinarily I should recommend poached eggs and a Welsh rabbit, but in the great crises of life nothing less than a devilled bone will support you."

"I'm not hungry, thanks."

"Of all reasons for eating, hunger is the most commonplace: it is the excuse of a bourgeois mind. Take a poached egg to put under your pillow. I want to tell you what I saw in the conservatory."

"I saw it too; you needn't bother."

"You didn't see what I did. You've no journalistic flair, no imagination. I've been brooding over all the possibilities of the scene till I've worked up a very dramatic picture. First of all there was little Sheila Farling . . ."

"Oh, dry up, Jack. You've been hard at work on her reputation for the last two hours; it's earned a rest."

Jack turned to the others with a rueful shrug of the shoulders.

"Wasted talent, my friends! A great public speaker, a man of sonorous periods and moving eloquence, but for *la vie intime, la chronique scandaleuse,* the *on dit* of daily existence, he has no aptitude. He will never be a conversationalist, he will never—Denys, if you won't eat, you might at least have the decency to smoke. Don't lose all your self-respect just because you're a member of Parliament: it's a thing that might happen to anyone."

Denys wandered over to a table by the window in search of matches. He did not want to eat or drink or talk: he wanted to slink away by himself and feed on his anger and amazement at what he had done. There was a vague consciousness in his mind that he had committed an irrevocable act of sheer insanity which would alter his whole course of life and stultify his previous existence. He wanted the satisfaction of plumbing the depths of his folly and measuring the completeness of his downfall; and as long as Jack Melbourne remained out of bed, volubly eager to describe and embroider the events of the evening, he felt bound in honour to stand by and protect Sheila's name from his wanton attack. Lighting his cigar, he looked out of the window at the cheerless, frost-bound garden. A full moon was shining on the empty snow-spread flower-beds, a bitter east wind caught up and played with the rustling dead leaves that lay scattered

over the shining flagstones of the terrace: it was the coldest night of the year. Then his eye fell upon something white which fluttered in the breeze at the head of a flight of stone steps: it was a girl's dress. The shadow of the house fell over that end of the terrace and made identification impossible, but he had little doubt that it was Sheila and that she was adding gratuitous pneumonia to her other follies. With a feeling of personal grievance that he had ever been brought in contact with a person who seemed to live for the sole purpose of exasperating him, he hurried out of the smoking-room, gathered a cloak from the hall and joined her on the terrace

"What on earth are you doing here, Sheila?" he asked in a tone of irritation. "You'll kill yourself in this wind."

"Hullo, Denys!" All the fire had gone out of her black eyes; she turned to him with the listless indifference of one who is too numbed and bruised to heed any further beating. "It takes a lot more than this to kill me. I'm not trying seriously."

"Put this cloak on and come back to the house. You ought to be in bed."

"I'm not ready for bed yet. I'm like the unwise king who went to war first and counted the cost afterwards."

"I hope you enjoy the reckoning." He had not meant to use the whip, but his earlier anger got the better of him.

"I do. There's only one thing worse than losing a battle, and that's winning one. I should think the Duke of Wellington probably said that. It sounds

like him. Denys, your friend Mr. Melbourne has a pleasant flow of language."

"Oh, damn my friend Mr. Melbourne," Denys burst out. "Come out of this wind, Sheila, and don't behave like a spoilt child of ten."

"Mr. Melbourne's very instructive. He had all the fun of overhearing Maurice and me in the conservatory, so I've paid myself back by listening to him. I suppose you'll all talk like him now."

"Then you're wrong."

"Oh, I didn't include you. I warned you beforehand, and besides, you don't think I'm accountable for my actions. But the others! Father Time's taking me away by the first train in the morning; he's stood a good deal from me, but he couldn't stand that. Poor old Father Time! he could hardly speak. And Uncle Herbert and Aunt Margaret! You can imagine what that was like. It was their fault, they brought it on themselves by allowing Maurice ever to have anything to do with Daphne." Her voice quavered and sank. "And Daphne says she never wants to see me or speak to me again!"

"And what do you think you've gained by all this?" asked Denys, still unappeased but conscious that his resentment was languishing for want of a victim. In the castigation of Sheila he had been forestalled.

"Oh, a good deal. I've won all along the line. Daphne won't marry Maurice now." She paused and looked away from him. "And I fancy I've spiked your gun, my friend."

"Meaning by that?"

"I saw the pretty way you and Daphne said good-night to each other. You'll find your power of mischief is a good deal hampered."

"Wait till you read Monday's papers," said Denys obstinately through set teeth. "I'm addressing South London workmen on Sunday night and I'm going to let myself go."

"Bah! you daren't. You're afraid of hurting Daphne."

"What do I care what Daphne . . . " he began.

"Oh, hush, hush! That's blasphemy, and it's rank ingratitude to me, which is a lot worse, after all I've done for you."

"Sheila, do you imagine I'm in love with Daphne?"

"Denys, I do."

"Then you're wrong. I'm no more in love with her than you are with Maurice, and the high gods alone know how I'm going to escape from the mess you've got me into."

"Don't talk such nonsense!" Her voice became suddenly pleading. "You do love her, you know you do. Why, the first time you met her, at their dance in town, you came and raved to me about her. And down in Devonshire it was the same, only you thought you couldn't do anything till Maurice was out of the way. I've got him out of the way for you; there's absolutely nothing to stop you. Aunt Margaret—she won't like it because she'd set her heart on Maurice, but Daphne's of age and can do what she likes. Oh, don't be silly! When she comes to you . . . What are you made of, Denys? It's not flesh and blood. What is it?"

"Oh, I don't know!" He clenched his hands in helpless vexation till the nails tore the skin. "Clay and ditch-water, that's why I'm afraid of her. She's made of something different; I could never rise to her heights. I'm of the earth, earthy, and Daphne's—I don't know what she is or where she comes from. I never realised what a mean, pitiable, shameful thing a man could be till I saw my own dwarfed reflection in those eyes of hers. Oh, Sheila, why did you do it? I suppose it was fair game to put a spoke in Maurice's wheel, though you needn't have done it in a way that hurt Daphne as much as you hurt her to-night. Oh yes, and I suppose it was fair game to try and put me out of action. You haven't, but there was no reason why you shouldn't try. But I'm hanged if it was fair game to make Daphne suffer. You ought to have counted that before you started meddling with destiny for your private amusement."

She turned on him with flashing eyes.

"Oh, you mean little worm! You think I'd endure what I've gone through to-night just for amusement, just to get my own way. Don't you? You don't think I did it because I cared for people or wanted to make things happier for them? You can't understand me disinterestedly trying to do a good turn to a person without any thought of reward. What do I care for your politics? You'll never harm me. I've just got to let you run on for a few months and you'll kill yourself. D'you think I didn't see that the first day I met you? You're killing yourself now—d'you think I can't see it, d'you think Daphne wouldn't see it if she weren't infatuated about you? Why do you think

I suggested your going to Uncle Herbert? Why do you think I wanted you to meet Daphne?"

"I honestly can't see what you hoped to get out of it."

"Get out of it? You're past praying for, Denys." She stamped her foot and panted with anger. "When I met you I was amused by you and rather liked you and felt sorry for you. You were lonely and ill and overworked and thought you were under a sort of cloud. I wanted to get you something to do that you'd like and that would lead to bigger things. And I thought I'd bring you and Daphne together to see how you got on. You got on very well, so well that you quite forgot you'd a grievance against the world. I knew you would; people only feed on grievances when they've nothing better to occupy their minds, and Daphne soon drove that nonsense out of the head. Lord! Why, I could cure you of your grievances in a week if I took the trouble. And now when every obstacle's cleared away and Daphne's simply . . . Denys, you don't know how hard I've worked for it and what it's cost me. Remember, Daphne's never going to speak to me again, and I love her more than anybody in the whole world. Please, Denys, I did try to do my best for you!"

He stared gloomily at the moonlight on the frozen pond at the bottom of the garden.

"It would have been better if we'd never met, Sheila, better for Daphne and better for me. Yes, and after what happened to-night, better for you too. Seven months' work, and you've got two people into an impossible position and earned the reputation of a

heartless flirt for yourself. Your intentions may have been good, but I can't congratulate you on the result."

"Was that meant for thanks?"

"It wasn't meant for anything: it was just a summary of the situation. Do you want thanks?"

"I don't want anything from you. I never want to see you or hear of you again."

"I'm sorry; I was thinking of coming with you and your grandfather to the Riviera. Is the invitation cancelled?"

"No, you can come or not, as you like. I'm entirely indifferent. You'll have my grandfather to talk to."

"Thank you." They had both lost their tempers, but for the moment neither perceived the absurdity of standing lightly clad in a biting east wind at four o'clock in the morning for the purpose of exchanging recriminations. Then Denys broke into a laugh: as Sheila's anger had risen, his own had fast been dying. Remembering the look of misery she had worn when he first spoke to her, and the punishments which were still in store when she faced her relations next day, he was sorry for not having kept a bridle on his tongue.

"We shall neither of us do any good by staying out here any longer," he said, looking at his stiff, blue fingers. "Let's make friends and forget what we've said to each other. I apologise for losing my temper and I'm glad to find someone else who is of the earth, earthy."

"Does that mean that I satisfy your requirements better than Daphne? I'm honoured, but the remark is out of place. You needn't waste your pretty ways on more than one person in an evening."

Denys gave up the attempt at reconciliation and

they entered the house together. As they walked upstairs, the supper-party emerged into the hall, and for a moment Melbourne's flow of words was checked. Then, as they reached the first landing, a remark travelled up far beyond the ears of those who were intended to hear it. "She's not lost much time," was the whispered comment, and an appreciative laugh was hastily converted into a cough. Sheila suddenly caught Denys by the arm, and as suddenly let go. "No, don't do anything," she said in a choking voice. "I deserve it." Then she hurriedly opened her bedroom door, threw herself on her bed without undressing, and cried herself to sleep. Denys changed into a smoking jacket and sat down in front of his fire to think out the future and listen to Maurice pacing up and down in the next room. Daphne alone was sleeping peacefully, unconscious of her neighbours' wakefulness, unappreciative of the irony with which her happiness was flavoured. She owed everything to a cousin whom she had said she would never see again, and while Denys mourned over the failure of his schemes, Sheila was crying over the success of hers.

The following day saw the resolution of the house-party into its elements: there was a marked preference for early trains and a universal unwillingness to participate in any scenes of leave-taking. Sheila and her grandfather breakfasted alone and left the house unnoticed. Lady Parkstone with her husband and daughter made no appearance until their car was standing at the door, and then accomplished a hurried exit with a bare word of farewell for stray, embarrassed visitors whose trains left later in the day. Denys

remained in his room until the middle of the morning and then returned to London by himself. Jack Melbourne alone was immovable until after luncheon, and even he allowed himself to be packed up and driven away when the bridge-table which he had organised in the smoking-room fell into dissolution. Throughout the day there was neither sight nor sound of Maurice: his guests left the house without knowing whether he had preceded them or was still locked in his own room brooding over the events of the previous evening. No one paid much attention to his absence: for most of the party the play was over and the curtain rung down. Sheila, Denys, and Daphne were too busily concerned with their private epilogue to waste thought on Maurice.

A fortnight later the episode was beginning to be forgotten, not through loss of intrinsic interest, but because speculation dried up for want of encouragement. No one knew what the next development would be, and the most ingenious guess-work went unrewarded. Then one of the chief actors was called upon to exhume and defend the past: Lord Badstow, travelling night and day from San Remo, had arrived in Grosvenor Square and invited his nephew to explain his conduct and state his intentions for the future.

"Oh, for pity's sake don't rub it in!" Maurice exclaimed at the end of an hour-long summing-up. "I know I've behaved like a sweep, but it beats me what good you think you'll do by repeatin' it over and over again. My stars! if I've earned half the names you've chucked at me, everybody ought to be praisin'

God with a loud voice and congratulatin' Daphne on gettin' rid of me."

"That is neither here nor there, my dear Maurice," said Lord Badstow with purring precision. He was a shrivelled and querulous little old man with white side-whiskers and an asthmatic wheeze. For more than twenty years the thought that Maurice would succeed him had been a source of deep mortification which had been gradually intensified by the knowledge that his nephew was financially independent and could not be starved into submission. In the circumstances it was a little surprising that Maurice should consent to be terrorised as much as he was, and spoke volumes for his uncle's force of character.

"You have got yourself into this disgraceful position and I must ask you how you propose to get out of it. I do not choose to have people saying that a member of my family has conducted himself like a blackguard."

"Look here, how did you hear about it?"

"That again is quite beside the point." As a matter of fact, Jack Melbourne was responsible for carrying the news to San Remo. He had started out to spend a libellous few days in Rome and had shared a compartment on the train de luxe as far as Monte Carlo with an Under Secretary who was bound for Lord Badstow's villa. Had he known the channel of information, Maurice's embarrassment would have been increased. "The point on which I desire your undivided attention, Maurice, is this. You have behaved scandalously to Lady Daphne, you have brought discredit on my name, and you have humiliated the Parkstones, who are old and valued friends of

mine. What do you propose to do? I must beg you to find an answer without unnecessary delay, as my health will not permit of my remaining in England later than to-morrow morning. I shall be obliged if you will cease fidgeting with that paper-knife."

Maurice dropped the knife with a clatter, picked up a pen and dropped that quickly.

"What in Heaven's name do you want me to do?" he growled. "I wrote to Daphne and apologised. Had the letter returned unopened: that was her ladyship's doing, I'll be bound. Then I called: 'Not at home.' When would she be at home? She wouldn't be at home to me, so that finished that. I tried to get hold of the Farlings before they went away. Not much change there; the old man was like a lump of ice, and Sheila wouldn't see me. I liked that, after the way . . . "

"I think we are wandering from the point, Maurice."

"Well, damn it, she was as much to blame as I was, and now she won't speak to me." He stopped with an expression of grievance on his face. "If any of you would tell me what to do, I'd do it. But you don't. You just sit and badger me till you're out of breath, and when you've got your second wind you start in and badger me again."

Lord Badstow rose up and rang the bell. "I do not think we can profitably continue the conversation while you are in your present frame of mind."

"Same idea struck me," murmured Maurice sullenly.

"The next time we meet I expect to hear that you

have taken every step in making reparation to the Parkstones."

"And you take jolly good care not to tell me how to do it. That's what's so helpful. Good-bye, I'm going to toddle round to Denys Playfair to see if he's got any ideas. He's the only living soul I've had a civil word from since this business started."

"I can well believe it. He will be a most suitable adviser."

"Well, what's the matter with him?" asked Maurice, stung by his uncle's sarcastic tone.

"I have never had the honour of meeting him, so I can only judge by what I read, particularly by the account of a speech he delivered at Lambeth a few days ago."

"Don't know anything about that, but he does have the decency not to tell me I'm a forsaken sweep in every sentence he speaks. That's somethin' of a consolation these hard times."

CHAPTER XIII

AN UNPOSTED LETTER

" And sometimes, by still harder fate,
The lovers meet, but meet too late.
Thy heart is mine!—*True, true! ah, true!*
Then, love, thy hand!—*Ah no! adieu!*"

MATTHEW ARNOLD: "TOO LATE"

AT four o'clock the following afternoon Maurice walked round to Buckingham Gate to seek counsel and consolation of Denys. A private car was drawn up opposite the door, and on reaching the flat he discovered a small girl engaged in conversation with Denys' servant. Her face was familiar, but a moment passed before he identified her as Melbourne's niece Margery, one of his uncle's youngest neighbours in Riversley and a well-known figure at every home meet of Collison's hounds. She was dressed in a long astrachan coat with muff and round cap to match, and her small face wore an expression of disappointment.

"If you're looking for Uncle Denys, you won't find him," she informed Maurice. "He's away, out of England, and they don't know when he'll be back. Of course he's not my uncle really, but he won't let me call him Mr. Playfair, and I can't call him Denys, so I call him Uncle Denys instead. Hallo! why, it's Mr. Weybrook! I didn't see who you were. You've forgotten me."

"Not I, Margery," said Maurice genially. "But this is a bad business about Denys. Where's he gone to?" he went on to the man.

"He went away ten days ago in Sir William Farling's yacht, sir. He was going to the Mediterranean but couldn't say when he would be back, and didn't leave any address for his letters."

"Oh, well, the Parkstones will know where he is, Margery, if it's anything that matters."

"It's nothing important, but it's rather sickening not finding him. I only got back from school yesterday—we broke up early with mumps—and Uncle Denys always said I was to come and have tea with him and he would always be at home. And now the first time I come he's away. I call it a jolly shame."

"And meantime you're goin' hungry? This must be seen to, Margery. I'm in the same boat, so I know the old feelin'. Why shouldn't you come and have tea with me? Choose your own place."

"We—ell." She considered the proposal with her head on one side. "The only thing is, mother sent me round in the car, and said I was to come straight back if Uncle Denys wouldn't have me."

"We'll send the car back with a message that we're havin' tea at Rumpelmayer's. She won't mind, Margery; if she does she can ring up and I'll bring you home at once."

On these terms the alliance was concluded, the car despatched with the tidings, and Maurice and Margery set off on foot across the park. Maurice was not particularly fond of children, but his resources were limited, and the last few days had been passed in such

loneliness that the sound of any voice was welcome. He cast about for a conversational opening.

"What have you been doin' with yourself since I saw you last?"

"School most of the time. I was down at Riversley in the holidays."

"Not started huntin' yet?"

"I'm going to, at Christmas. I say, who's going to be the new master?"

"Dunno, I'm sure."

"Mother said she heard you were going to be."

"I thought of it, but I shan't have the time. Jove, but it would have been good fun," he added regretfully.

"What are you doing? I mean, why won't you have the time? I didn't know you did anything."

"No more I did, till the summer. Then I started to do some work—down in the East-end—and I've taken it up again this last week. It's a pretty fair sweat, I don't mind tellin' you."

"Why d'you do it?"

"Lord knows. I s'pose we all of us have to do things we don't like without knowin' why. Even you, Margery? We're just told it's good for us. Aren't you ever told that?"

"Oh yes. Mother's always saying that, and I'm to wait till I'm older and then I shall see why I had to do it. I thought it was different with grown-ups."

"It isn't."

"But they can't make you."

"Oh yes, they can."

"How?"

Maurice shrugged his shoulders. "Dunno. It's like

eatin' peas with a knife—no law against it, free country and so forth, but people don't like to see it. Same here. Free country, I *could* hunt 'em, but it 'ud mean goin' against a girl I want to oblige. And I never want to set foot in that beastly East-end again, but every mornin' down I go just the same, 'cos I think she'd like it."

"Who is she?"

"Ah, that's tellin'," said Maurice, awakening to the fact that he had been thinking aloud.

Margery summed up with the deliberate emphasis of childhood.

"Well, it's jolly rough luck on you, and I think she's rather a pig to make you."

"Oh no, she isn't," said Maurice gently. "An' she doesn't even know I'm doin' it."

They had crossed the park and were standing on the curb outside Marlborough House waiting for the stream of traffic along Pall Mall and up St. James's Street to abate sufficiently to allow of their crossing. "Barrin' Blackfriars, this is the most dangerous street in London," remarked Maurice. "Now then, Margery, here's our chance; give us your hand." With one eye on a large car which was bearing down on them, they stepped off the pavement and walked quickly in the direction of Rumpelmayer's. Then Margery came to a standstill with the words: "Stop a bit, I've dropped my brolly." As she stooped to pick it up, she glanced past her escort and saw the car within six feet of them. With a cry of terror she jumped forward, hesitated, and then tried to run back. Maurice seized her by the hand and swung her at arm's length out of danger

as the driver applied both brakes with all his power. Then he tried to jump after her. It was too late, the car was almost touching him, and as he jumped the mud-guard caught him in the back and flung him head foremost on to the pavement. Margery scrambled to her knees in time to see a twisted, motionless figure lying with its head bathed in blood; then a shouting, excited crowd sprang miraculously up between them, a policeman loomed head and shoulders above the rest, a terrified chauffeur protested that he was not to blame for the accident, while the white-faced owner forced his way through the crowd, picked Margery up in his arms and carried her back into the car. For a few dazed moments there was a hubbub of questions and answers, then an ambulance appeared and Maurice was lifted inside it.

"Tell me where you live, dear," said the owner of the car.

"Eaton— No, take me to Lord Parkstone; I must see him."

With her face buried in his coat, and gripping his hand with both her own, Margery was driven to Berkeley Square. At the door she got out and the owner drove off to St. George's Hospital, with a promise to return later and report progress. Margery rang the bell and demanded to see Lord Parkstone.

"He is engaged at the moment, miss," said the footman. "What name shall I say?"

"Oh, but I can't help that, I must see him. Where is he?" She pushed past the man and opened a door at random: it was the dining-room. "Where is he? Oh, do tell me where he is!" she cried

hysterically, running down the passage and trying another handle. The astonished footman made an attempt to bar the way, but it was too late, and all he could do was to follow the child into his master's presence and stand apologetically at the door, framing an explanation of the unwonted act of sacrilege. Lord Parkstone was sitting at his writing-table with head bent over a pile of type-written letters which his secretary had brought in. For a moment he was too absorbed to notice the interruption, then he looked up to find a small, white-faced child standing at his side with her hand on his shoulder and asking if he were Lord Parkstone.

"I? Yes, yes. Certainly. That is so," he stammered in surprise. "Excuse me, do I . . . that is to say, have we . . . "

"I want you to tell me Mr. Denys Playfair's address. I've got something I must tell him."

"Denys Playfair's address? He's abroad. Let me see—no, I'm afraid I don't know it. He was going to be at Monte Carlo at the beginning of the week, but I don't know how soon they were going to start back. I don't think I can help you."

"Oh!" Her face fell and she seemed on the verge of tears.

"Wait a bit," he exclaimed hopefully. "Daphne may know. Is Lady Daphne in her room, William?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Will you ask her . . . ? No, we'll go up to her," he added with an eye on the piled-up writing-table.

To the footman's increasing surprise, Lord Parkstone took Margery by the hand and led her upstairs

to his daughter's room. Lady Daphne was sitting in an armchair before the fire reading a letter she had just written. It was addressed to Denys, and its composition had brought a happy smile into her eyes. Ever since their parting at the foot of the stairs at Riversley she had been struggling with the problem how she ought to tell her parents what had passed between them. The news would entail opposition, though the opposition would eventually be overcome: since his début in the political world Denys was regarded with a more approving eye by both her parents. At the same time she shrank from the prospect of opposition. In the letter just written she had procrastinated and shelved responsibility. "Tell granddad," she had written, "but say he's to keep it a secret for the present. I'm sure he'll approve. And then when you get back we must go and tell father together. I simply daren't tell him myself, you know what a dreadful coward I am when there's nobody to support me." Then the letter had passed to more important things. The composition had brought great peace of mind to her, and a reflection of her inner contentment seemed to light up her face. As he entered the room, her father paused for a moment of half-surprised pleasure at the reflection that this graceful, brown-eyed, brown-haired beauty was his own daughter. He seemed never to have realised it before. Then he came into the room and brought Margery up to her chair.

"Daphne, my dear," he said, "do you happen to know Denys' address? Our friend here is very anxious to know it."

Daphne turned in her chair.

"Why, Margery, this is nice to see you! What brings you here?"

"I want Uncle Denys: I want to tell him something."

"He's on the high seas at present, Margery, but he'll be back in about seven days' time. If it's anything very important you could write to him at Gibraltar, there's just time to catch him there."

"Not for seven days? But I want him back at once!"

"Is it anything I can do?"

"No, no, no! I must see him! You must tell him to come back at once! A friend of his has just been knocked down by a car and it was all my fault and he's dying, and they've taken him off to the hospital and his head was all bleeding and he wanted to see Uncle Denys because he said so when we met at the flat." Her voice rose in an agonised treble and then dropped almost to a whisper. "You must tell him he must come back at once. It was his friend Mr. Weybrook and they've taken him to St. George's Hospital. Oh, and he's dying, and it was all my fault."

For a moment she stood erect with eager, frightened eyes, her hands clenched, her breath coming and going in irregular gasps. Then the taut string snapped and she dropped in a heap on the floor, weeping with convulsive sobs. Daphne picked her up and carried her back to the chair. "St. George's," she whispered to her father, "go and see what's happened, dad." Then she turned her attention to the sobbing child,

pressing the golden head to her bosom and waiting in patient silence till the paroxysm had spent itself. Gradually the small body ceased to tremble and the intervals between the sobs became longer, until at last she ended with a sigh and raised a tear-stained face to be kissed.

"Oh, I've cried all down your dress," she exclaimed in dismay.

"It doesn't matter a bit, Margery," said Daphne, surveying the damage to the green silk dress she was wearing. "Now let's get comfy and then you shall tell me all about what happened."

Holding the child on her knees and running a hand through the disordered tangle of golden hair, Daphne listened to a recital which went back to the day many months previously when she had first met Denys. The ability to prune a story of its unessentials, to come to the heart of the narrative or to start anywhere but at the beginning, is a mark of mature mind not revealed to babes and sucklings. Beginning at the day when Jack Melbourne and Denys had first met at Oxford, Margery proceeded by leisurely stages to her encounter with Maurice that afternoon at Buckingham Gate. Daphne listened half-heartedly to the account of what Margery's mother had said to Margery, what Margery had said to Denys' man, and what Maurice had said to Margery. Then suddenly her attention became alert: the child was repeating their conversation on the subject of the vacant mastership of hounds and the uncongenial work lately resumed in the East-end. A phrase here and there burned itself into her brain. "Then he said, 'I've taken it

up again this last week. It's a pretty fair sweat, I don't mind telling you.' And I said, 'Well, why d'you do it?' And he said, 'I should like to hunt those hounds but I can't without going against a girl I want to oblige.' Then he said, 'Every morning down I go just the same, because I think she'd like it.' And I said, 'Well, she must be rather a pig,' and he said, 'Oh no, she isn't, she doesn't even know I'm doing it.'" Then the narrative swept on to the subject of the accident, and Daphne had to comfort the child again to prevent a fresh outburst of weeping.

When the story was over and Margery had been persuaded that she was not responsible for the accident, a reaction set in and their positions were reversed. It was now Daphne's turn to sit silent and preoccupied while her visitor chattered unrestrainedly and plied her with an unending series of questions. Yes, she knew Uncle Jack slightly. Didn't she love him, or did he tease her? Well, she didn't know him well enough to love him. Yes, she had known Mr. Weybrook for some years, and admitted that it was very rough luck that he shouldn't be allowed to hunt the hounds if he wanted to. Yes, she had known Uncle Denys for some time. Foreseeing the inevitable following question: didn't she love him? Daphne interrupted by asking if Margery knew that he was now a member of Parliament. Margery's interest in politics was limited, but the temporary check drove the embarrassing question from her mind and she applied herself to the discovery of further friends possessed in common.

Their conversation was interrupted by the return of Lord Parkstone. He had telephoned to Mrs.

Melbourne that he would call for her on his way back from the hospital, and they entered the room together.

"They wouldn't let me see him," he told Daphne in French. "But he's alive and conscious and they don't think there's any danger. He's very much bruised and cut, though, and they can't say yet how much damage has been done to his back. It's just possible . . ."

"Yes?"

"He may lose the use of his legs."

Daphne put her lips to Margery's ear and translated freely.

"Father's been to the hospital," she whispered, "and he isn't nearly so bad as we thought. I expect he'll be quite all right in a few days, and I'm going down to see him as soon as they'll let me. Now about Uncle Denys. I don't think we'll write to him, Margery, because it might upset him, and he's been overworking and oughtn't to be worried. Suppose we wait till he's back in England? As soon as he's landed I'll go round and tell him all about it, and by that time we'll hope Mr. Weybrook will be . . ." she was going to say "on his legs again" . . . "quite well. Shall we leave it like that? It's a promise, then, and as soon as I've seen Mr. Weybrook I'll come and tell you how he's getting on."

She kissed the child again and restored her to her mother. While her father accompanied them downstairs she stood leaning her head on her hand and gazing into the fire.

"I'm afraid this has been rather an upset to you, Daphne," said Lord Parkstone on his return.

"How does Maurice seem? I should like to go down to the hospital as soon as they'll let me."

"I was going to make the same suggestion; I think he'd like it, only you won't be able to go for a day or two. I gather he's . . . well, he's not a pretty sight, Daphne, and it always makes me feel rather sick to see anybody in so much pain. He's bearing it awfully well, though, I was told; just sets his teeth and let's them do whatever they like with him."

"Yes, he would." She turned and gazed once more into the fire.

"I think I'd go and lie down, Daphne, if I were you. —Yes, William, what is it?"

"Are there any more letters, my lord?" asked the footman, who had just entered the room with a salver in his hand.

"Mine are on my table downstairs. Have you any you want to go, Daphne? It's a quarter-past six."

"No, it's too late now," she said, thoughtfully fingering the letter she had written to Denys. Then she slowly tore it into four and dropped the fragments into the fire. "I've lost the mail, father dear."

. . . . .

Nine days later the "Bird of Time" was beating up channel, two and a half days late and with the prospect of further delay before them. Since passing Finisterre they had run into a succession of fog-banks, and their progress was reduced to an hour's steaming at quarter power, followed by two, three, or four hours at anchor in wet, penetrating mist, the air around them filled with the petulant, timid hootings of outward-bound mail-boats.

Denys was sitting on deck wrapped in a thick coat and sucking at an old pipe. The three weeks he had spent with the Farlings had been the most constrained and uncomfortable he had ever experienced. To begin with, he had come into a house divided against itself. Sir William was still far from being reconciled to his granddaughter for the part she had played at the Riversley ball, however much he might approve of the probable result; Sheila was sore and sensitive at the treatment she had received from her relations, exaggerating their antagonism to herself and keeping alive an undiscriminating resentment against anyone who was even remotely connected with the Riversley episode. In the next place, Denys was not at ease with his host. On the day of embarkation the papers had been full of his Lambeth speech. Partly to justify his boast to Sheila, partly to satisfy a nervous anger and impatience, he had—as he had promised—"let himself go." The Labour organs were delighted, but the responsible Conservative papers wrote of the meeting in terms of undisguised misgiving. It was impossible not to see that their fears were appreciated and to some extent shared by Sir William.

There was yet another source of embarrassment. Now that he was far from the memories of his life's work and removed from the excitements of a political campaign, Denys experienced the usual reaction: the unreality of his grievances, the unrighteousness of his crusade were thoughts far more insistent than the old dogged and uncompromising desire for revenge which had kept him alive in the early days of struggle

when he had first come to live in London. Never had he been so reluctant to gird himself for battle, never had he dreamed so lovingly of his books, his comfortable rooms, and his unfinished researches. He was once more sensible of a rebellious conscience: it seemed intolerable that he should have been launched into politics, that he should at that very moment be financially supported, by a man who had no conception of his real aims, a member of those very possessory classes which it was his mission to exploit.

"Rather different weather, Denys, from what we had the last time we sailed these waters together."

Sir William pulled up a chair alongside and borrowed a corner of Denys' rug.

"It is. I congratulate you on the 'Bird of Time,' Sir William; she's a beautifully found boat."

"I wish you were coming with us. I can't congratulate you on your looks, my boy, and you've got an awful cough still. I'll back the South Seas to cure that."

"It's too late, I'm afraid. I'm too deeply committed. If you'd asked me seven months ago, when we were coming back from Spain, I'd have accepted. But now . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished and followed out his train of thought. It was not only his political engagements which called him to London; Daphne also awaited him. And it was not his newly-won dignities alone which made it too late for him to think of a prolonged holiday in warm waters; he felt that his heart and lungs had been left to fend for themselves until it was too late to think of patching them.

"Don't be in too much of a hurry when you get back," went on Sir William, returning to his chair. "You know, that speech of yours in Lambeth was a fine appeal to Labour, but it comes too early in the day for our stick-in-the-muds. A few more speeches of the same kind and you'll be disowned. The success of your career lies in driving two parties in double harness: any fool can lead one party—more or less—and it's not one party we want. You've bridled Labour up to the present, but the Front Bench needs a lot of breaking-in. Old Palace Yard is white with the bones of men who set out to modernise the Conservative Party." He paused to light a cigar. "Another thing: if you're in too much of a hurry, you'll just break down, and I don't want to have your life on my conscience."

"But I'm all right."

"You're not, Denys. Excuse my contradicting you flatly, but you're not. I've watched you gradually bending under the strain ever since you started, and it's made me very uncomfortable. I'm morally responsible for starting you in political life, as Sheila never fails to remind me, and if anything happens to you, I shall be held to blame. Here, this is too cold for me."

Struggling to his feet from the depths of the deck-chair, he sought the warmth of the saloon. Denys glanced down the deck, wondering if it were a propitious moment for entering into conversation with Sheila. For three weeks his relations with her had been unbearable. In every word and act she was bitterly faithful to her declaration that she never

wished to see or speak to him again ; and perhaps t
most exasperating feature of her conduct was that t
more she slighted him and the more irreconcilable s
became, the nearer he was drawn to her and t
greater sacrifices he felt prepared to make for ev
the smallest crumb of her affection. A dozen times
day he summed up the position and passed senten
on her : he liked her, he liked her very much, he w
—yes, there was no doubt about it this time—he w
in love with her and would do anything for her an
submit to any kind of treatment at her hands. Sh
had decided that he was to marry her cousi
Well, he was going to, she had so contrived that ther
was no escape. Frankly, he did not love Daphn
because—well, she seemed too ethereal to mate wit
common clay. He had said as much, and regretted th
hour when Sheila first took it upon herself to play th
agent of providence. For that word he had been placed
under the ban of excommunication. He jumped up
irritably from his chair and went off in search of her.
His summings-up always ended in the same way, and
were humanly characteristic of man's dealing with
woman : he found her guilty on every count of the
indictment and then hurried to placate her with
apologies.

" We shall be off Dungeness in half an hour, Sheila," he began. " Then for the blessed sight of English newspapers—that is, if the pilot is the man and brother I hope to find him."

There was no answer, so he sat down on deck at her feet.

" I say, Sheila, we shall be in before evening ; you're

leaving again in a few weeks' time for goodness knows how long; in the interval I promise not to speak to you or bother you in any way. Do let's be friends for just our last day together. From the moment we land I promise on my honour never to cross your path again."

She looked at him absently and then continued to gaze at the banks of fog which were once more gathering round the boat. The voyage had been a long agony to her. Fully recognising that Denys had in no way injured her and had instead gone out of his way to be agreeable and to effect a rapprochement, she had lost no opportunity of bleeding him to death by pin-pricks. Every morning she met him with the resolution of apologising for her behaviour, every afternoon she insulted him, and every evening she retired to her cabin and whistled loudly to keep from crying over what she had done. He had come on board dark-eyed and hollow-cheeked, torn with coughing and worn out with the strain of the past months: he was coming back to twelve more weeks of winter, if anything rather worse than when he set out. She had never felt so frightened on his account before, she had never so deeply appreciated his winning manner and charm of speech, and she had never been so swept off her feet by an uncontrollable frenzy for inflicting pain. At the bottom of her heart she knew the reason: Denys had been dedicated to Daphne before she knew that she could not bear to be parted from him. If once she relaxed her attitude of inhumanity she dared not contemplate to what lengths she might be carried.

"I'm quite willing to be friends," she began rather wearily. "It's only fair to remind you, though, that you told me at Riversley that you regretted the day you ever met me."

"I know, and I apologised, and I repeat my apology. I shall never experience anything that would compensate me for some of the days I've spent with you these last six months."

"Thank you: perhaps you'd like a spade next time. I don't like half-measures when there are compliments flying about."

He resisted the temptation to make a sharp reply.

"We've covered a good deal of ground since we sailed along this coast six months ago," he remarked thoughtfully. "I was going back then to a directorship in an insurance company, to spend my spare time trying to win my way into politics at the point of a pen, and looking out the while for a wife rich enough to support me in comparative idleness. And now," he relit his pipe, "the directorship's gone because I didn't approve of their methods of doing business, and the company's been running rather quickly downhill since the last time I crossed their threshold, and I've made a lasting enemy of one of my colleagues. But I've got into the House in spite of that enemy and several others."

Sheila rearranged the cushion behind her head.

"I see you only dwell on the successes, my young friend."

"What else is there to dwell on?"

"Well—how about the failures? You've been put into Parliament by Uncle Herbert and Father Time

and Daphne. Oh, I know you worked hard for it, I've not forgotten the 'Trustees of Posterity,' but you wouldn't have got in without them, and whenever you think how much you owe them, you begin to squirm. You're squirming now, Denys. Admit it."

There was no answer.

"Failure number one. And from time to time, say when you're just coming back to England, you think what a ridiculous figure you're cutting and how much happier you'd have been if you'd never given up your Fellowship and left Oxford to preach anarchy. And then you squirm again."

Once more there was no answer.

"Failure number two. At night you lie in bed coughing and thinking what a fool you were to tax your strength making open-air speeches when you ought to have been sitting before the fire drinking hot whiskey and water, or whatever it is one does drink. My dear boy, do you think I can't hear you? I lie awake at night listening to you coughing. Then you wonder how long you'll be able to last, and you squirm again. And when you've finished squirming over that, you think of Daphne and imagine yourself looking her in the eyes and trying to tell her—or hide from her, it doesn't matter which—what I found out one summer day when we travelled down to Riversley together. Squirm on, my little friend, it's good for you, it takes the conceit out of you."

For the first time since the Riversley ball she had dropped her frigidity of manner and gone back to the easy bantering tone of their earlier intimacy Denys did not mind the onslaught, he was willing to

admit, to himself, the truth of each one of her charges. It was a triumph to have won her back to a mood of good-tempered raillery.

" What's your own record, Sheila ? " he asked.

" Mine ? I won every hand, every game and every rubber. I started out to save Daphne from Maurice, and I've saved her," she added between set teeth. " And I started out to show you you must be a good little boy and not indulge in naughty temper because some old ancestor of yours was punished for breaking the laws of the land. Of course I've lost a trick here and there : Riversley's a closed country to me for some time to come and I've lost you as a friend, which is a pity, because you used to amuse me. But I never undertook to win grand slam in every hand. And so," she sighed as she spoke, " you're just one of the little tricks I've lost."

" So the old charge is true : there's nothing you won't sacifice, not even your friends, to get your own way."

" Meaning you ? I didn't contemplate losing you when I started to play. I was sorry to lose you, Denys, you were quite a dear at times, but you had to go."

" Why ? "

" Wouldn't you like to know ! There was one moment when I had the alternative of sacrificing you and winning the game or sacrificing the game and keeping you. Then I thought of Daphne and Maurice and I let you be trumped. I quite felt the loss, Denys ; I feel it still. I shall miss you a lot, because we're never going to meet again when once we're back in England. Yes, you want to know why, don't you ? And you're

just not going to be told, not if you roasted me over a slow fire. What's all the fuss about up there?"

"We're taking the pilot on board."

"Well, see if they've brought any papers with them. You were crying out for news a few minutes ago."

"That was because you were grumpy. I want to sit and talk, Sheila, if this is really our last day together."

"And you want to sit and show me what a beautiful profile you've got. You have, I admit it, so now you can go and look for papers. My dear, London may have been burnt down since we left Gib."

Denys walked forward and greeted the pilot, a stout man who had to be assisted over the side by means of a line and required five minutes' rest before he had recovered his breath sufficiently to speak.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," he gasped. "Papers? 'Pon my soul, I'm afraid I've forgot to bring any. Not that there's any news worth speaking of the last week or so. But you'd be glad of anything, I suppose. Stop a bit!" he thrust a gouty hand into the bottomless depths of his coat-pocket. "I've got this, but it's three days old. If it's any good to you, sir, you're welcome to it."

"Let's have a look at it if I may," said Denys, "we've seen nothing since we left Gib.'

He returned with his prize to Sheila's chair, and for ten minutes they sat conning the greasy pages. Then Denys gave a sudden start and began to read with attention. At the bottom of the middle page, sandwiched between a wedding and a hunt-ball, was a short paragraph entitled: "Accident to the Marquis

of Badstow's heir." He read it and handed the sheet to Sheila with a finger marking the item. It ran:

"An accident of a serious character took place yesterday afternoon at the St. James's Street end of Pall Mall. Mr. Maurice Weybrook, the nephew and heir to the Marquis of Badstow, was crossing Pall Mall in company with a small girl when a private car rounded the corner on its way to the park. The car does not appear to have been driven at excessive speed, but the child seems to have become frightened and to have lost her head. Mr. Weybrook succeeded in getting her out of the way of the car but was unable to jump clear himself. The mud-guard struck him and threw him with considerable violence on to the pavement. He was at once removed in an ambulance to St. George's Hospital, where he is said to be lying in a critical condition. Mr. Weybrook, who is the only son of the late Lord Arthur Weybrook, and grandson of the fourth Marquis, is twenty-five years of age and until this year held a commission in the Third Grenadier Guards. He is well known in Society and will be the recipient of widespread sympathy."

Sheila handed back the paper. "Poor Maurice!" she said in a sobered tone. "I almost wis' I hadn't treated him like that."

"It's rather late in the day to be feeling that," said Denys, thinking aloud. The news of the accident had shocked him and revived the warm regard which he had always entertained for the good-natured, good-tempered, blundering, bucolic Maurice. He could

never free himself from the idea that he had—all unwittingly—been drawn in to play a not quite honourable part in the general conspiracy against him. Some part of the remorse which he now felt rising within him he chose to visit on the head of Sheila.

"It is too late in the day to be of much use," she said absently. She too was thinking aloud, though Denys' thoughts and her own ran on widely different lines. If it were predestined that Maurice should be knocked down and killed, she could not resist the unchristian thought that he might have been put out of the way six months earlier. Then Daphne's troubles would have been ended without any interference on her part: that hateful evening at Riversley would be a nightmare still in embryo, the last three weeks' mortification of the spirit would have been spared, and she would have been relieved of the necessity for reminding Denys that they were spending their last day together. She confessed to herself that it was an unchristian feeling, but at the moment she was concerned less with Christianity than with her love for Denys.

"Yes," she repeated thoughtfully, picking up the paper again, "I'm afraid it's come too late to be of any use at all."

CHAPTER XIV

DENYS TRIES TO KEEP HIS PROMISE

"Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World."

J. M. SYNGE: "THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD."

AT nine o'clock the same evening Denys was sitting by himself at Buckingham Gate. A neglected *Westminster Gazette* lay beside his plate: several weeks' accumulation of letters stared at him in dumb reproach from the mantelpiece, and after three unsuccessful attempts at friendship the blue Persian had retired to preserve her dignity on the hearth-rug. He was trying to realise his position and what it involved. He would have to see Daphne next day and find whether she had communicated to her parents the terms of their parting at Riversley. It did not matter greatly whether she had or not, save in so far as the narration was likely to involve him in an embarrassing interview with her mother. And then—but that was the end so far as Daphne was concerned: it would be but a question of time before he committed the criminal folly of marrying a girl he did not love. His thoughts turned to his public position: in another six weeks the King would be opening Parliament and the new member would take his seat. On the first suitable occasion

he would make his maiden speech—and declare himself.

Then he would have to face the consequences. He felt he should not mind the official criticism of the party leaders he was supposed to be following: they had had their warning in the "Trustees of Posterity," and for the present at least he did not propose to advance one inch beyond what he had advocated there. Moreover, the criticism would be tempered by the fact that the "Trustees" stood in Lord Parkstone's name: it was impossible to attack the agent and spare the principal. With Sir William it was different: to accept his money and support and then attack him with the weapons of his own providing was a prospect which he did not relish.

He pictured the expression of lofty contempt on Sheila's face and "squirmed" as she had told him he would squirm. It was true that he would not be present to see it, as he had undertaken never to cross her path again: but it would be there none the less, and even when he carried out his intention of refusing all further assistance from her grandfather, she would continue to despise him. And if he could dismiss Sheila from his mind and disregard her opinion of him, there was still Daphne to placate—or remain implacable. He would rather lose a year of life than cause her pain. Already he was wronging her sufficiently by marrying her, and yet there was no escape from the dilemma. She would one day wake to find herself the wife of a dangerous incendiary and demagogue, and it was only in this way that he could avenge the memory of his dead grandfather and shov himself

worthy of his father's name. Lives and houses and land had already been sacrificed, there was nothing else left for him to give; but as he stared at the changing colours of the fire, he reflected bitterly that his own sacrifice was the heaviest.

Leaving his savoury untasted, he was beginning to peel a pear when his attention was attracted by the sound of voices in the hall. His servant was saying: "Mr. Playfair is now at dinner. What name shall I tell him?" and a female voice answered: "Oh, well, don't interrupt him, then. When he has finished, will you say that a lady would like to speak to him for a moment?" There was no mistaking the soft, grave tones of the voice, and Denys jumped up and hurried into the hall as the man was closing the door after showing Lady Daphne into the library. She did not hear him come in, and stood for a moment enjoying the restful warmth of the deep-carpeted, book-lined room. Then as he closed the door she turned with a little cry of pleasure.

"I oughtn't to be here, ought I, Denys?" she said, "but I had to come. There's been some very bad news while you were away and I promised to tell you as soon as you got back." She paused and looked round her as though she were afraid to approach the subject of her visit. "What a lovely room; I've never been here before."

"Let me help you out of your cloak, Daphne," he said, "you'll find it hot in here."

"Oh, but I mustn't stay, Denys. No, I won't even sit down, thanks. I just want to tell you something and ask you to do something for me and then I must go.

Nobody knows where I am at present." She walked over to the fire and stood with her arm resting on the mantelpiece while Denys lit a cigar and sat opposite her on the edge of his writing-table. She was wearing a sable cloak, open at the throat, and round her neck hung the pendant which he had given her at Riversley. Her dress was of black silk and seemed to make her usually pale face paler by contrast; the pupils of her dark brown eyes were dilated with excitement; the quickness of her breathing and the trembling of her whole body gave evidence of the emotional stress under which she was speaking.

"Denys, I suppose you've not heard about Maurice?" she began.

"Nothing fresh. This afternoon I saw an account of the accident in an old paper. I was going to inquire to-morrow. Is he . . ."

"Then you *have* heard." She sighed and then went on. "That makes it easier in a way. No, he's not going to die, they say he's out of danger now, but he may not be able to walk again. I saw him for a few minutes this afternoon."

"How did he seem?"

"Bad. Oh, he's very bad, but they say he's bearing it all very well. He wouldn't talk about himself but he inquired after you. I think he was surprised at my coming. In fact, he said he hadn't expected to see me again."

She paused again and he watched her in silence. Then she went on quickly: "Denys, I've misjudged Maurice, there's a lot more good in him that I thought. After Riversley I never meant to see him again. He

called and I wouldn't see him, and he wrote and mother sent him back his letter. I felt nothing could make me forgive his . . . But I saw him to-day and said: 'Well, Maurice, how are you?' and he said: 'Fit as a fiddle, thanks, Daphne,' and then he apologised for—for Riversley. Denys, I don't believe he'd have behaved like that if it hadn't been for Sheila. Ever since he came back to town he's been trying to see me to say how sorry he was, and when I wouldn't have anything to do with him, do you know, he went off all by himself visiting in the East-end at the houses where we went together in the summer. He didn't tell me about that, I heard it from someone else. I nearly cried when I heard it. Maurice must have hated it so, and it seemed quite pathetic to think of him doing it just to please me and never expecting I should find out. Maurice is better than I thought."

Denys smoked on with his eyes fixed on Daphne's face. He felt that she had not called on him with so much urgency merely to describe her visit to the hospital, but he had no idea of the climax she was approaching. Then suddenly she lowered her voice and stammered out the announcement which had held her in white and trembling anticipation.

"Denys, I . . . I feel I can't leave Maurice like this! It would be so mean, so hateful. I know he oughtn't to have behaved like that at Riversley, but he has been trying to wipe it out. Mind you, he hasn't said anything to me about it, he didn't make any capital out of lying there swathed in bandages, he didn't try to work on my feelings. Just the other way. He said he certainly wouldn't be able to hunt Collison's

hounds now, and as a matter of fact I know that he refused two days before the accident because he wanted me to see that hunting wasn't the only thing he cared for. Denys, I do really believe he loves me still!"

"I'm sure he does."

"Then what ought I to do? At least, I know what I ought to do: I want you to agree that I'm doing right."

"Do you love Maurice, Daphne?"

He waited silently for the answer, and waited sadly. Now that he was on the verge of losing her, he could appreciate the magnitude of his loss. Once before in Devonshire and once at Riversley he had melted in pity at the sight of the beautiful grave eyes and face of suffering. Now again, when he thought of her life-long bondage in a loveless union, he was irresistibly moved to assert his false claim and spare her at least the appearance of the greater evil. He could never love her, because she lived among the stars and breathed a finer air, but he was never nearer loving her than at that moment; and if he could not offer her love, he could make her sure of solicitude and sympathy. For a while she did not reply and he repeated his question. She turned from the fire, weighing her words with a strange mixture of fearlessness and indecision.

"No, I don't."

"Then . . ."

"No!" She seemed to have found the clue to her tangled thoughts. "That's not the right standpoint, Denys. That's what you said in Devonshire, and I think I believed it then. But I don't now. Love isn't everything. I wish it were, but it's only a small part

of something much bigger and much more difficult. It isn't just 'Do I love Maurice?' It's 'What is my duty to Maurice?' I've really only seen that this last week. If it hadn't been for the accident . . . I don't know. But I don't feel I ought to leave him now."

Denys threw away his cigar and got down from the table where he had been sitting. Standing opposite to her in the firelight and looking into her eyes he began slowly and uncertainly to make his last appeal: the same helpless and predestined feeling which had possessed him at Riversley again laid hold of his mind; he was struggling for a prize which he dared not win, and seeking to overcome a resistance which he feared might prove only too short-lived.

"It's a question of duty, Daphne," he said. "Yes, I agree. But you're thinking of your duty to Maurice and forgetting your duty to yourself."

She shook her head. "There isn't one—here."

"Oh, but there is! Leave me out of the calculation, imagine you're meeting me now for the first time, and just consider what it will mean if you marry Maurice. You're twenty-one, Daphne, and he's twenty-five. Thirty, forty, fifty years, perhaps, you'll live with him, and not one idea in common. He'll do his best to meet you and see life from your point of view, because he's in love with you. As long as he *is* in love with you," he added thoughtfully. "And you'll try to meet him and take an interest in his side of life, and you'll both succeed—for a month or two. But after that—Daphne, you don't appreciate what marriage means; it's a life-time, an eternity, perhaps the only eternity we ever

know. You can't treat it as if it were a dinner-party, and you were going down with a stranger; you can't exist on polite small-talk, you must have something to fall back on. What have you got in common with Maurice? You haven't the same tastes or manners, you don't read the same books, there's as wide a gulf between you as if you talked a different language. There's no sympathy between your souls; it's an armed neutrality at best. And that's your lot for the whole of life. I hate to talk like this, because I seem to be running Maurice down when he can't defend himself. It's very fine of you to say you can't leave him now that he's down and broken, but you've a right to consider your own happiness, and I want you to tell me what happiness you think you'll win by marrying a man you don't even pretend to love."

"I'm not thinking of my own happiness," she said softly.

"But you should be, it's what we're here for. If anyone believed he was put into the world and denied the opportunity of seeking to extract the maximum of happiness from an imperfect scheme of things, life would be insupportable; he would commit suicide. It's the deepest instinct of our being. What else have we to guide us?"

She passed her hand over her eyes with a gentle sigh. "I've thought all that out this last week: I've been finding answers to a lot of questions that used to puzzle me. Love isn't everything, and our instincts are very untrustworthy guides. If we depended on them, nothing would ever be done and we should be no better than the beasts, hunting and eating and sleeping and

hunting again. We're made of finer stuff than that, Denys, and we prove it by the way we take troubl to do things we don't like just because—well, because we feel we ought to. Look at father, look at yourself, everyone you know—they all behave in a certain way because they feel it's their duty; and now that I'm faced with the choice, I've got to do the thing I know to be right."

"But, Daphne . . ."

"Oh, don't make it harder for me!" The words were whispered with a piteous tremble of the voice. Then she came up to him and placed her wrists on his shoulders, clasping the hands behind his head. "You can't picture what I've gone through this last week. I'd written to say you were to tell granddad, and as soon as you got back we were going to tell father—together . . . Then I heard about Maurice. It did seem hard! I thought about it and argued with myself about it and I tried to find a way out, but it was no good. Maurice wants me and I must go to him: it's really, really got to be good-bye this time. You must forget about it all, Denys, and I mustn't see you till—till I'm out of harm's way. No! don't say anything to shake me! I'm not strong enough. We must shut the door to-night, here, now!" She laid her cheek against his with a convulsive sob, and then unclasping her hands stepped back with her eyes bent to the ground. "I oughtn't to have done that, but I couldn't help it. Now you must help me, and then we'll say good-bye."

"What am I to do?" he asked in a dead voice.

"You remember taking me to that newspaper office in the summer? I want you to go and have an

announcement put in for to-morrow. I wrote it out but I don't know if you think it'll do." She took a slip of paper out of the bosom of her dress and handed it to him. Denys read it, altered a word here and there, and gave it back. It ran :

" Mr. Maurice Weybrook, who met with an accident last week, is reported to be progressing as favourably as could be expected. In consequence of the accident, his marriage with Lady Daphne Grayling, the only daughter of the Earl of Parkstone, has had to be postponed. The ceremony was to have taken place in the New Year, and we are informed that the date will be announced as soon as Mr. Weybrook is sufficiently recovered."

Daphne read the amended announcement and gave it back with an air of finality.

" You'll go round at once, won't you, Denys ? I want it to appear to-morrow—for Maurice's sake ; I was only waiting till you got back. Don't tell anyone till it's appeared, or mother will stop it. And that . . . that's all."

As she fastened her cloak she looked once more round the room, to take in every detail and stamp the impression on her mind. Then she took Denys' hand and bade him farewell, conventionally and without emotion. He accompanied her to the door, picked up a coat and hat in the hall, and walked down to the street. Whistling for a taxi, he put her into it, and with a glance at his watch began to walk eastward to the office of the *Newsletter*.

It was midnight before his mission was accomplished

and he found himself once more sitting in front of his library fire. As he had walked back from Fleet Street, he had passed a piano-organ playing a new ragtime that he had not heard before. The air lingered in his memory, and he discovered himself half unconsciously whistling it over to himself. To concentrate his mind on the train of thought which Daphne's arrival had interrupted, he lit a fresh cigar, and as the blue smoke-rings widened and broke he seemed gradually to be piercing the haze and viewing the future in undistorted perspective. Unexpectedly, almost miraculously, he had been rescued from the false position in which Sheila had placed him with regard to Daphne. He was surprised to find how little relief he felt at the escape, and how great in proportion were his pity and sense of loss. Something large and vital and palpitating seemed to have been torn out of his life, leaving him chastened, spiritless, and lonely. Of course his path had been cleared and straightened: he would go round to Sir William the next day, and on the plea of a desire for greater independence beg that the financial assistance he was at present enjoying be discontinued. And then, forgetting Daphne and Sheila, he would fight as he had never fought before, sword and gun, tooth and nail, until he had make his voice heard and his leadership accepted.

It was the only thing that remained to him Lying back in his chair, he considered at what point he could intervene with most effect and turn the privilege of a maiden speech to most account. He began to review the list of government measures for the forthcoming session. The Reform of the Poor Law, that would do:

or he could begin earlier and take part in the debate on the Address. And then he found his mind wandering away from Parliament and occupying itself with the picture of Sheila Farling. Daphne's retirement from the stage had left him free to play out his drama without hindrance or interruption: he had told himself this so many times that he was coming to regard it as the only change which the evening's events had made in his fortunes. But at the back of his mind he now realised that he was free to offer himself to Sheila—if he thought it worth while to invite a rejection. He was half glad that she would have nothing to do with him, because that made it easier to pursue his mission with single-minded purpose. But he was more than half sorry that, in the nine months he had known her, he had been unable to win any share of her well-guarded affections or arouse any feelings more intimate than those of amused and contemptuous toleration. He knew her no better than on the day in early spring when he had walked up the accommodation-ladder at Gibraltar, to find her standing, slight, black-eyed and mischievous, waiting for her grandfather to introduce them to each other.

In the interval much had happened. He counted off each fresh development on his fingers. First he had figured as a legitimate source of amusement to her; then she had decided to employ him as an instrument of providence in freeing her cousin from the unfortunate engagement to Maurice; then the new combination of forces was to be used to foil the political schemes to which his life had been devoted. The Riversley ball had been her Austerlitz: everything had been staked

on it and, whatever its issue, the result for him was the same. If she won, she had no further use for him: if she lost—as she had lost—her forces were too shattered for a fresh engagement. They would never meet again, even to fight.

That disposed of Sheila. His cigar had gone out, and as he relit it he found that he had not disposed of Sheila in any way. At that moment she was probably sitting in front of a fire, soft, warm, intensely human and eminently lovable. She was talking with that delightful rapid utterance interspersed with cascades of silvery laughter which he so loved to hear. And he was sitting lonely and cheerless, separated by the breadth of the park. In a month's time they would be separated by the breadth of the Atlantic; in six months' time by the breadth of the world and the length of Eternity. It annoyed him to see how firm a grip she had taken of his thoughts, and starting up from his chair he began to pace up and down the room with his hands locked behind his back. Suddenly he came to a standstill in front of the fire. Above the mantelpiece was a blank space on the wall: the portrait of his grandfather had stood there until he had removed it at her request. There was no reason under heaven why he should regard her requests now, and with a smile of unamiable purpose he left the library in search of the picture. It was lying in the box-room, already deep in dust, and he had to brush the canvas gently with a towel before the lean, drawn face leapt out to confront him with its dark, deep-set eyes, outstanding cheek-bones, and haunting expression of mute, suffering reproach.

For a few moments he gazed at it under the spell of a morbid fascination. Then some particles of the long-accumulated dust laid hold of his throat and set him coughing. Resting the picture against a chair he started up and walked the length of the library, coughing as though a spirit had entered into him and were tearing his lungs into ribbons. At last the paroxysm spent itself and he sank on to a sofa, gasping and wiping the perspiration from his forehead. Then—for no reason but an indefinable fear—he put the handkerchief to his lips and gazed with sickening horror at a bright red stain of blood. He had expected it for three years, but every day that passed without the fulfilment of his expectation had established him in a sense of uneasy security. With a sudden feeling of almost guilty repulsion he dropped the handkerchief into the fire and watched the blood-stain blackening, shrivelling, and finally disappearing from view. Then he re-hung the portrait in its old place and stood for a moment to draw inspiration and wrath from the face of sorrow.

Then, with the shadow of death at his elbow, he sat down to arrange an appointment with Dr. Gaisford, and deal with the accumulated arrears of correspondence.

"If you're not going to follow my advice in any single particular, Denys, I candidly don't know why you troubled to let me examine you."

Dr. Gaisford swung round in his revolving, leather-backed chair and faced his patient.

"I wanted to know how I stood. May I smoke?"

"No. I forbid it absolutely, and if you won't obey me at other times, I can at least get my way in my own consulting-room. Well, you know now exactly how you stand. You're touched, but at present it's nothing very serious. If you'll go away at once for six months —South Africa or Canada—you'll come back cured, and you can take up your parliamentary duties and marry a wife and do just what you please. If you don't, well, it's only a question of weeks, or at most of months, before you get past mending."

"I see. Well, it's most satisfactory to know just how much rope you allow me. Good-bye, doctor. We meet on Thursday at the Empire Hotel."

"Sit down, Denys. Look here, I'm not talking as your doctor now, I'm talking as a man twice your own age and an old friend into the bargain. What's the matter? I want to be taken into your confidence."

"There's nothing the matter."

"You may tell that to the marines! I've just warned you that if you don't clear out of England you'll die and no time lost about it. You tell me you won't go. I retort that you're deliberately committing suicide. Denys, is it a question of money? Because if it is, I'll never forgive you for not drawing on me."

"It isn't money, and I know I can always turn to you in a difficulty, and you know I know it and that I'm properly grateful. It's just a question of time. I can't run away for the whole of my first session."

Dr. Gaisford drummed with his fingers on the writing-table. "Think you're going to make anything of a mark in the House, Denys?"

"One hopes so."

"Are you going to make it in your first three months?"

"That's rather short time, isn't it?"

"It's all you'll get. Why not postdate your triumphs for six months and then start to win them with a decent constitution. Life is sweet, my friend Denys."

"No, I'm damned if it is," the young man burst out explosively.

"Believe me, you're wrong. I've had nearly twice as much of it as you've had, and it grows sweeter every day. And I never had half your brains or a tithe of your good looks. You're out of sorts and down on your luck and you can't judge properly. You must let me judge for you."

Denys got up and struggled into a heavy fur coat. "I'll see if life is any sweeter at your supper-party, doctor," he remarked. "I suppose you're not cancelling my invitation, are you?"

"I ought to. You oughtn't to be out these foggy December nights, but if you don't come to me you'll go somewhere else, and I can at least keep you from smoking."

"Not if you've got a spark of the old hospitality about you," said Denys with a laugh that ended in a fit of coughing.

The following Thursday evening Dr. Gaisford was seated at the head of his supper-table in a private room at the Empire Hotel. It was Christmas Eve, and the hotel had inaugurated a gala night with Christmas trees, evergreens, a distribution of presents,

and a ball starting at midnight. The table was laid for forty guests and the average age was about three-and-twenty. The doctor loved to be surrounded by young faces, and had only overstepped the age limit in one instance by inviting Sir William Farling to keep him company when Sheila retired with his other guests to take part in the ball. Supper was just beginning, and the doctor, under cover of examining his own menu, was wondering why Denys had made him alter the disposition of the table in order to separate Sheila and himself.

"No trumps," remarked Jack Melbourne, laying down his menu with a sigh of appreciative contentment. "And it looks like forty above for the grand slam. No! I'm defeated: omelette à l'absinthe beats me. 'Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweetness.' The last time I met that dish I exceeded and was seriously unwell."

"There's something unhealthy about your appetite, Jack," remarked his neighbour, "we must get the doctor to examine you and see if you're wasting."

"No need, thanks," rejoined Melbourne, "my appetite's only an instance of the scientific principle that nature abhors a vacuum. Have a salted almond or give me time to see who's here." His eye roved round the table until it fell on a young Indian civilian sitting opposite him. "Hullo, Sinclair," he called out, "how long are you home for?"

"I'm going back in March. I wondered if I should meet you here to-night."

"Where the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Been making history in India?"

"I've got married, if you call that making history."

"I call it a revelation quite unsuited to mixed company!"

"From which I gather you're still unmarried. What are you doing with yourself these times?"

"Remaining unmarried. This is the age of specialisation."

"But taking your not inconsiderable personal charms into account, isn't that rather a selfish and inhuman ideal?"

"Oh, possibly." He turned and addressed his neighbour in an undertone. "A most depressing young man, Sinclair. He always fancies one has to be doing something or putting one's shoulder to a wheel of some kind or other. He won every prize at school and at the 'Varsity, and passed into the Indian Civil head of the list. His life is a record of wasted opportunities. Now he's married a wife and will spend the evening of his declining days in crying over the milk he never had the immoral courage to spill. You heard him just now asking me what I was doing. He has never studied the modern theory of the division of labour."

"And what is that?" asked his neighbour, one of those freckled, pale-faced girls who are so plain that they fear no one will ever take the trouble to shock them, but hope on nevertheless.

"The theory that some people like work and others don't, and if you leave work undone long enough someone else will do it for you."

"We can't all exist on that theory; there must always be a certain amount of give and take."

"True, and it requires a very high order of mind to

know how much you can take and how little you need give."

He swallowed the last oyster with evident regret, and fidgeted discontentedly with his fish-knife till the soup made its appearance. In the meantime, Sinclair returned to the attack.

"I believe you used to know my wife—Gertrude Ibbetson she was."

"Did I?" He turned to the freckled girl with an ill-concealed groan. "Gertrude Ibbetson! That stamps the man."

"But surely you can't . . . "

"Indeed you can. Nowadays a man is known by the wives he keeps. Talking of which, did you read your *Newsletter* this morning? I see Lady Daphne's going to marry Maurice after all."

"Including Riversley. Yes, I was rather surprised. Have you seen Maurice since the accident?"

"Yes, I called round at the hospital to-day. He wasn't a beauty at the best of times, but love must be pretty blind to tolerate him now. He looked like a child's puzzle with several of the principal pieces left out."

"Is he going to get all right?"

"Oh, I think so. He'll get back the use of his legs, and his head doesn't seem capable of further damage."

"How did the Parkstones take the announcement?"

"I think they were fairly well satisfied. Lady Parkstone told Sir William that nothing could have been more creditable than Maurice's apology to Daphne. 'The words came straight from his heart,' she said."

"What did Sir William say?"

"'Straight from his head, I should fancy,'" said Jack with a good imitation of Sir William's voice of displeasure. "'Ex nihilo nihil fit.' And as his daughter doesn't understand Latin, I think the honours rest with him. Miss Sheila's the person I want to talk to. I should like to get to the bottom of the Riversley episode: she doesn't seem half as much cut up as she ought to be, after taking the trouble to be found out so flagrantly. The whole thing offends my sense of . . ." He hesitated for a word.

"Morality?" suggested the freckled girl.

"Propriety, rather. Morality is the art of being found out at the right time."

Having exhausted most of the impromptus with which he had come armed, Melbourne concentrated his attention on wild duck and orange salad and left the conversation to take care of itself. With less acerbity of treatment, the subject of Maurice Weybrook's accident had been discussed from end to end of the long table. He was known to all present, and as four-fifths of the guests had attended the Riversley ball, the announcement in that morning's *Newsletter* had given fresh life to their reminiscences and conjectures regarding the scene in the conservatory. The only members of the party who refused to join the discussion were Sir William, Denys, Dr. Gaisford, and Sheila. Remembering the degree of intimacy which they had achieved on their homeward voyage in the spring, the doctor had originally decided that Denys and Sheila should sit next each other. When Denys begged for a rearrangement of the table, he had himself taken Sheila in and given Denys charge of the

Indian civilian's wife. His early speculations on the division between the two young people had been forgotten in the general cares of hospitality: as Sheila talked with an exuberance and abandon which surprised even herself, there seemed little obligation on him to look for broken hearts to mend.

She was dressed in chestnut-brown, hemmed with skunk and tasselled with gold. Her black eyes were shining with pure, untroubled joy of existence, and all within earshot took their time from her silvery ripple of laughter. Sir William glanced down the table once or twice, wondering at the sudden change which had come over her. After the night of the Riversley ball, the gaiety had died out of her as though a clumsy giant had crushed the life out of her butterfly body. In a moment, and no later than that same morning, the head had raised itself, the fire had come back to her eyes, and the Sheila that he most loved had been born again. He had noticed the change at breakfast, and since then nothing had had power to ruffle her. Even the definitive announcement of her cousin's coming marriage elicited no outburst. She had apparently read it before he could get hold of the papers, but his own caustic comments failed to arouse any sympathetic echo.

After breakfast she had taken counsel of her familiar spirit. Seated at the piano, she had reviewed the whole situation to a soft accompaniment of certain favourite waltzes which she had danced with Denys in the early summer. The fight had been manfully fought out, she had spent all her treasure in Daphne's cause, and if Daphne chose to marry Maurice in spite of her sacri-

fices and endeavours she could do no more. Yet the sacrifice had not been made in vain: it was only when she seemed to have lost Denys beyond power of recall that she appreciated her need for him. It was worth much to have found that out, it was worth the humiliation at Riversley to have discovered that he did not love Daphne. It had been a narrow, providential escape, and she did not choose to calculate how much she owed to a chance motor accident at the corner of Pall Mall. And now the clouds had rolled away, Denys stood free of the shackles she had riveted on him.

Suddenly she stopped playing and walked away to the window. She supposed she was not building without foundations: she was justified in thinking that freedom for Denys meant only a new servitude. He had said nothing to support such a theory in all the time she had known him; her evidence of his devotion to her was of a flimsy, negative character. She picked up a white chrysanthemum and began to pull it petal from petal, and then threw it impatiently away because she found herself playing the children's game, "He loves me, he loves me not." Of course he loved her: if he did not—as she ruefully admitted to herself—no man would have endured the slights she had from time to time put upon him. And Denys was the only person whose anger at Riversley had been founded on the injury she was doing to her own good name. Of course he loved her, and it was that thought which sent the blood to her cheeks and the light into her eyes as she looked down the table to the place where he sat in conversation with his vis-à-vis, the clear-cut outline of his features turned to her in profile, the soft, low

voice occasionally audible above the gusty, intermittent laughter of his neighbours.

All too slowly for Sheila the supper dragged its course, until at last the cigars were reached and her host made his way round the table distributing the presents he had chosen for his guests. With all the patience she could muster, she waited through a seemingly interminable period of smoking until at last the opening bars of the first waltz floated up the stairs from the ball-room. With the regretful sigh of the well-fed, the men threw away their cigars, pushed back their chairs, and accepted the programmes which a waiter was serving out. Dr. Gaisford and Sir William retired hors de combat, and Sheila found herself, as usual, surrounded by a clamorous throng of admirers.

"Four, seven, nine, and sixteen, Miss Sheila," began Jack Melbourne. "I suppose there'll be another supper; there ought to be, and I should like it if I may have it. What about eleven and twelve for supper?"

"You can't have supper, Mr. Melbourne," said Sheila, "I'm keeping it."

"Go away, Jack, you've had more than your fair share," expostulated another admirer. "Sheila, what have you got left in the first half? May I have the first two, and eight, and thirteen, and eighteen, and the first extra?"

"Miss Farling, are you booked for six?" broke in a third. "Then may I have it? And nine? Well, who's got nine? he'll have to change. Jack, you've got to swap nine with me." He wandered off to effect a deal with Melbourne while Sheila gazed in dismay at her programme. Half the dances were already gone,

and Denys had not even approached her. She glanced round the room and saw him still seated at the table thoughtfully finishing his cigar.

"Sheila, what have you got left?" The tumult was breaking out afresh.

"Come back in a week's time and I may be clear by then," she cried out in desperation. "I'm in such a muddle now that everybody will get everybody else's dances the whole night through."

As the circle broke up and faded away in search of fresh partners, she walked to the end of the room where Denys was sitting in lonely enjoyment of his cigar.

"I'm rather disappointed in you, Denys," she said gently.

He rose up wearily and dropped the end of the cigar into a finger-bowl.

"I'm sorry, Sheila, but it really wasn't my fault. If the doctor had told me who was coming, I'd have spared you my presence."

"I wasn't meaning that. And you know I wasn't. You don't go out of your way to make yourself pleasant now that we have met."

"I'm doing my best. I promised not to darken your path, and through no fault of my own I've broken the promise."

"I'll forgive you and we'll lay the blame at the doctor's door. Denys, do be nice to me. I've been keeping 'Douces Pensées' for you, and 'Liebestraum' and 'Rêve de Printemps,' and you can have some more if you like."

As soon as the programmes were distributed he had put on his gloves and scribbled his initials at the top of

a card. As Sheila finished speaking he began to unbutton them.

"All three of those are good," he remarked critically. "'Douces Pensées'—we danced that together at Lady Parkstone's ball just before you sent me down to Devonshire. And 'Liebestraum'—we were going to have that at Riversley, only—we missed it. 'Rêve de Printemps' I've never had with you, though I remember dancing it with Daphne—at Riversley. All three of them revive pleasantly sinister memories. It's very kind of you, Sheila, but I don't think it will help things if we prolong the agony. I apologise for my presence, and I think we'd better say good-bye to each other."

"Denys!" She laid a restraining hand on his arm. "Denys, just to please me!"

"I'm not dancing to-night, Sheila."

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF ONE VISION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT

"Behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground."
I SAM. v:

"CONGRATULATE you on your speech, Playfair."

"Oh, thanks very much."

Denys looked up and tried to identify the speaker, one of many hundred strangers confusedly encountered in the lobby or dining-room. He was beginning to remember their faces and constituencies, beginning to feel at home in the House of Commons, and the greater familiarity brought with it a sense of overwhelming disillusionment. A month earlier he had taken his seat : the entry into the House, the cheering, the oath, the introduction to the Speaker lingered in his mind as the last phase of a life's dream. Then he had gradually, painfully awakened. For a while he refused to admit his own disillusionment : he was not yet reconciled to the strangeness of his new surroundings, the formality and circumlocution, the cut-and-dried methods of the Whips' office, the machine-made victories in the lobbies, the disappearance of man as an individual and his re-emergence as a voter.

As he rose to his feet the dream finally melted away. The Government's Electoral Reform Bill was under

consideration, the House reasonably full and more than usually indulgent to a new member. He had spoken well, earning encouragement from his own side and complimentary words from the Minister in charge of the bill: there would be no transference of votes, but he had secured a gratifying amount of lip-homage. Then amid more compliments and congratulation he had escaped, to be alone with his despair. The House of Commons with its jaded audience, its vitiated atmosphere, its artificial forms and style, its hatred of heroics, its spirit of solemn puerility, is a disappointment to most unseasoned members: the greater their seriousness and ardour, the greater will be the sense of bathos. To one whose earlier experience has lain among great popular meetings—quick, emotional, and responsive—the chastening influence of a House of Commons' audience is almost insupportable. Denys' vision had seemed nearest achievement when he was addressing South London workmen at the Lambeth Public Baths: he had played with them and hypnotised them. The vision was never so remote and unreal as when a succession of well-meaning friends congratulated him on the best maiden speech of recent years and prophesied a great political future.

Passing by the Local Government Board offices to collect his thoughts, he walked up Whitehall, down the Strand and Fleet Street, up Ludgate Hill and into the City. He was unconsciously bidding farewell to London and the vampires that had sucked his blood for five years. First the narrow, grimy office of the *Newsletter*, then the pretentious marble-pillared edifice of the Anglo-Hiberian. Walking westward among the

Embankment he followed the course trodden eight months earlier with Daphne, past the Savoy, across the Strand, up Southampton Street into Covent Garden, along Endick Street, through Leicester Square, down Piccadilly to Devonshire House, and so into Berkeley Square. One chapter after another of his life lay trimmed and folded, the engines would run on for a few more weeks or months, but there was nothing more to print.

Turning back along Berkeley Street he entered the Green Park and walked in the direction of Buckingham Gate. The sight of the house reminded him of a last possible image still to be overtaken and he entered Clarges Row. The House of Commons, in robbing him of his vision had left him purposeless: his health was broken that remained was to slink away and die. He would like to die alone, as he had lived, independent and ineffectual, to cut away the last ties that united him to his fellow-man. On the pleasure later of calling to say good-bye to Sir [illegible], to thank him for his support and announce his intention of retiring thereafter as a free lance. There was another sub-conscious intention, or at least expectation, in his mind. Though he remained obstinately true to his bitter promise and refused to meet Sheila, he was in hopes of catching a last glimpse of her before she sailed. In the pocket of his coat lay a red morocco jewel case containing a gold chain set with pearls: he had brought it as a birthday present, though by the time her birthday was reached she would be among the Coral Islands of the Pacific and he . . . No one knew where he would be.

"Sir William is not at home, sir, at present. Miss Sheila is in."

"Oh, I won't bother her, thank you, Simpson. I think I'll come in and wait till Sir William comes back."

He was shown into the library of the flat and provided with cigarettes and the evening papers. A bright fire was burning and he sat down in front of it, shivering even in his fur coat. In another week the Farlings were starting for the South Seas. Yawning cavities in the bookcases and an unwonted absence of papers on the writing-table betokened their approaching departure. It was not known how long they would be away, but a minimum absence of twelve months was expected. Another summer, another autumn with falling leaves, shortening days and deepening mists, and then another pitiless winter: ever since his visit to Dr. Gaisford a month before, Denys had been watching his symptoms with morbid interest and had convinced himself that he could not outlast another English winter. And he was afraid to die. Every torment which could be devised by a highly-strung, nervous spirit living in loneliness and depression had been put into practice and only superseded when one of greater ingenuity suggested itself. He had studied the subject of phthisis in an encyclopædia and marked down cases where a surprising longevity had been attained despite the scourge; and then he had entered upon the other side of the account those classic instances of malignant attacks where death had been sighted at the distance of a few days, almost of a few hours.

Without any seriousness of purpose he had once as a matter of interest weighed himself after dinner at the

club, and noted the result in his pocket-book. Thereafter it became a fixed habit and well-nigh a religious observance never to leave the club without a visit to the weighing-machine. At times he would be seized with terror when the dial registered an unexpectedly low figure, until the change was explained away by the fact that he was now weighing himself in thin dress-clothes: at times again a passing sense of security would be shattered by the reflection that he had absent-mindedly forgotten to remove his overcoat. He became obsessed with false shame and a fear that everyone was noticing the ebb of his strength: whenever he coughed there was an irresistible furtive application of a handkerchief to his lips.

Despite his promise he found himself praying for an opportunity of meeting Sheila before he left, and asking her in person to accept his present and an apology for his behaviour at Dr. Gaisford's supper-party. The sound of a quick, light step was audible from the adjoining room, but the snatches of song which usually marked her presence were wanting. Then the telephone bell rang out from the library and she entered behind his chair. Passing without seeing him, she picked up the instrument.

"Hallo! Yes. Sheila. Who? Oh, Denys. He's not come yet, but I'll tell him to stay when he does turn up. My dear, I can't, I'm in the middle of packing and don't in the least want to talk to him. Oh, of course if you want me to, I will. I say, don't ring off yet, Father Time. When will you be back? Then I'd better say we shan't want dinner till a quarter to nine. You'll have to entertain him afterwards, then.

I simply must pack, and I don't seem to have any clothes to wear, even in the Pacific. Good-bye."

She replaced the receiver and turned to find Denys facing her with his back to the fire.

"Hallo," she remarked without embarrassment. "I didn't know you were there. You've just heard me tell Father Time that I don't in the least want you asked to stay to dinner. However, as you are here, we must do our best for you. Been here long?"

He glanced at his watch. "About half an hour."

"Oh, I was in the next room if you'd wanted to see me."

"I didn't care to disturb you."

"No. Well, just tell me if you've got everything you want, and then I must run away and pack. Cigarettes, matches; have something to drink, won't you? And why not take off your coat?"

"I'm rather cold."

"My dear, this room's like a charnel-house."

Denys helped himself to a cigarette, chiefly because he wanted something to do, some distraction to put him at his ease. Sheila was being provokingly polite and matter-of-fact; she showed neither annoyance nor pleasure at seeing him; he was merely one of her grandfather's guests, to be treated with conventional civility while he remained under their roof-tree. This attitude of urbane aloofness was probably indicative of her true relationship to him; he had never been more than an acquaintance of the market-place, and any unbending to closer intimacy had been inspired by detached and remorseless purpose. The deeper his conviction, the greater grew his desire to disprove its

truth. His hand slipped into his pocket and brought forth the morocco case.

"Sheila, I've brought you a birthday present," he began diffidently.

"How kind of you, especially as it isn't my birthday for another five months."

"I know, but I shan't be within a thousand miles of you then. Have a look at it?"

She opened the case and glanced at the chain without taking it out. "It's very pretty." Then she snapped down the lid and handed it back to him. "Hadn't you better keep it for someone who'll appreciate it better? I'm not wearing jewellery these times," she added in a tone that reminded him of his own last words at the supper-party. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not in the least. I say, don't let me interrupt your packing." He leant against the mantelpiece, inhaling the smoke of his cigarette. Sheila lingered in the room, unwilling to leave him, unable to keep command of her tongue and ready to bite it out for the words it had just spoken. They stood for a moment in silence, then the smoke of the cigarette set Denys coughing. The attack increased in violence with every effort to check it, until at last he dropped into a chair gasping for breath, with the veins standing out on his forehead. Through force of habit he pressed his handkerchief to his lips and brought it away stained as on the night when he had bade farewell to Daphne. Then, recollecting Sheila's presence, he hid it from view and picked up the cigarette from where it had dropped on the carpet when the paroxysm gripped him. Sheila

watched him for a moment and then sat down in the chair at the opposite side of the fireplace.

"I suppose I was meant not to see that," she said in a tone of detachment which was meant to disguise her horror. "How long has this been going on?"

"Oh, not long. Do you know how soon Sir William will be back? I'll leave a note if he's likely to be long."

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"Yes. May I write your grandfather a line, Sheila?"

"No. What did he say?"

"A lot of things; doctors always do."

"Did he say you ought not to stop in this country?"

"Yes. I say, need we pursue the subject? It's not particularly interesting."

"It is to me. Why don't you do what he tells you?"

"Why should I? What's to be gained by it?"

"Well, it might save your life. That's worth thinking of."

"Is it?"

"Isn't it? You're just starting your career in parliament; everybody tells me how promising you are," she added scornfully.

"That must be gratifying to you. Good-bye, Sheila: let's be honest for once and admit it when we're beaten. If anyone would take my grandfather's memory and drown it, I should be the first to thank him. I've made my maiden speech and my gods died at the end of it. The fight's over. I'm sick of it, I'm done for."

He held out his hand preparatory to leaving. Sheila got up from her chair and took it without letting it go.

"Why are you staying, then, if there's nothing to stay for?"

"What's to be won by going anywhere else? I know St. Moritz and Davos and Mentone and Egypt. I've said good-bye to so many people who've been ordered south, and I've met so many more who've gone out there to die. I used to think I'd like to finish up in Ireland, but London's the place I know best and love best. And it'll come quickest if I stay here."

"Is that an advantage?"

Absently he possessed himself of her other hand and swung them gently together. "It's the only satisfactory solution. I've got nothing to look forward to. You don't appreciate what it is, Sheila, to have the bottom suddenly knocked out of the work that's kept you going ever since you can remember. What good is it to me to get patched up and sent back to an existence without any purpose or interest in it? All the time I thought I'd a mission in life, I was fretting and grumbling, wanting to get back to my books. I was beginning to make a name there—before I got—what I thought was—a call. Now that I *could* go back—oh, I'm tired, tired!"

"But when you're rested and well . . ."

He shook his head. "Not good enough. The fight's gone out of me; there's nothing to come back to. I've got no relations to miss me and not many friends. If you'd tell me a single living soul who cared whether I lived or died, I'd listen to you. As it is, half a dozen people will say 'How sad! Only six-and-twenty! Such a promising young man, too!' And there it'll end. Sheila, before I say good-bye I should

like to apologise for being—rude to you at Gaisford's supper. And I wish you'd take the chain; you may not care for it, but you can salve your conscience with the reflection that no one else is likely to care for it more. And now—I'm sorry, I didn't notice I'd been holding your hands all this time. Good-bye."

He turned and walked to the door, leaving her standing motionless in the firelight. His last act had been to place the jewel-case once more in her hand, and she gazed absently at it for a moment before ringing the bell to have him shown out. Then, as she crossed the library to her own room, there was the sound of a fall followed by the slam of the front door. She listened for a further sound and was going into the hall to investigate, when the footman entered with a scared expression on his face.

"Mr. Playfair's taken ill, miss," he began. "I was showing him out when he dropped all of a heap and fell against the door. I think he's fainted, miss."

Sheila hurried past him into the hall to find Denys lying grotesquely huddled with his head in the umbrella stand. Motioning to the man to take him by the shoulders she lifted his feet and the two of them carried him into the library and laid him on the sofa. Then she dismissed Simpson for water and brandy, undid Denys' collar, and telephoned for Dr. Gaisford. Feverishly replacing the receiver, she opened the window and sprinkled the passive face with water. After a seemingly interminable time she was rewarded with the sight of a faint movement, followed by a weary opening of the eyes. They were instantly closed again and he lay back for a moment with a sigh. Then gradually

exerting himself he rose to a sitting posture and gazed unsteadily round the room.

"Sit still, don't move, drink this," she ordered, holding a tumbler to his lips.

He took the glass in a trembling hand and gulped down the raw spirit. Then breathing painfully he made an effort to rise.

"Sit down, Denys," she implored him; "oh, do keep still."

"I'm all right, I was only a bit faint. I'm often like that."

"Sit down, *please*, Denys." She put her hands on his shoulders and forced him gently back on to the sofa. "I've telephoned for Dr. Gaisford and he's coming round at once."

"Bah! what's the good of that? He'll tell me to go to bed, and I won't go to bed. And he'll tell me to go abroad, and I won't go abroad." He spoke with the petulance of an angry child.

"And he'll say you must take care of yourself—to please me," she whispered.

"And I . . . Oh, thank you, Sheila. I'd already included you in the half-dozen people who'd say 'How sad, so young!'"

Sheila was too frightened to heed or be hurt by the words. She sat silent, watching the drawn face and closed eyes till a welcome ring announced the doctor's arrival. Gaisford made a hasty examination and then took Sheila outside the door.

"Can you fix him up a bed here? Well, get it done at once and I'll put him into it. Young fool! I warned him what would happen. And he's not to

get out of it on any pretext whatever till I give him leave. By the way, aren't you just going abroad ? "

" Doesn't matter, we'll wait."

" It'd be better, certainly; if he gets to his own place nobody can manage him . . . I don't know if Sir William has any influence with him; he's as obstinate as a mule, I can't get him to listen to reason. Somebody's got to get him out of England and keep him out till he's cured."

Sheila nodded without speaking.

" Meantime he'll want a nurse. I'll send one in."

" No, I'll look after him."

" But you don't know anything about nursing."

" I'll do whatever you tell me."

" It's too much of a strain for a slip of a girl like you."

" Oh, please, please let me ! "

" You must have relief; you can't do night and day."

" Oh, I can."

The doctor patted her cheek and shook his head.

" I'll send a nurse round in the morning, the best I can find. She won't be as good as you, but she'll do her best. Now if you'll order the bed I'll move him in."

At midnight Denys awoke and tried to remember where he was. He had been undressed and put to bed without resistance and had fallen immediately into a heavy sleep. As his eyes opened and took in first the night-light, then the fire, then the strange wall-paper and unfamiliar furniture, Sheila rose from her chair and crept noiselessly to the bedside. He gave an exclamation of surprise as he saw her, then the

memory of the evening came back to him and he stretched out a hand and caught hold of her fingers.

"You must go to sleep again," she whispered, smoothing the pillow with her disengaged hand. He carried the imprisoned fingers to his lips, kissed them and dropped asleep again, smiling.

At two he awoke again and raised himself in bed with a painful struggle. Sheila was sitting with the firelight reflected in her black eyes and her hair tied in two heavy plaits falling forward over her shoulders and stretching down to her knees. As he moved she again came forward and asked what he wanted.

"I was afraid you'd gone," he said.

"I won't go."

"Never?"

"Not till you're all right."

"Never?" he repeated.

"You mustn't talk, you must go to sleep."

"Never, Sheila?"

"Not if . . . if you want me," she whispered.

Denys raised himself further in the bed and looked at her. "Will you get me some water, please?"

She filled a tumbler and handed it him.

"I've got something to tell you," he said when the water was finished.

"Not now, Denys; you mustn't talk, you must go to sleep again."

"But it's very important."

"It'll keep till the morning. Do lie down again, to please me."

"I'm going to get well, Sheila. To please you."

"But you won't if you talk now."

"I'm going to sleep in one minute, but I must tell you my discovery. It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me or anyone in the world. It was this evening, yesterday evening, whenever it was. I thought nobody cared if I lived or died. And I was wrong. And I saw I was wrong the last time I woke up and found you sitting there. And I shut my eyes and went to sleep, because I was quite sure it couldn't be true. But it was a lovely dream."

Sheila put her hands on his shoulders and made him lie down again.

"Dear old muddle-head!" she said with a little sob. "Oh, Denys, what an affliction it must be to be a man! You can't put two and two together unless it's written down in black and white, and then you'll add it up wrong. Didn't you see I cared for you from the moment we met on board? D'you think it wasn't gall and wormwood to me to see the way you admired Daphne? Of course I'd have done anything to get Daphne out of her engagement to Maurice, but why d'you think I ever sent you to her if it wasn't that I thought you loved her and I wanted to make you happy? You'll never know what I went through when I thought I'd succeeded. It's too bad to tell. That night at Riversley—it was the first time I ever thought you cared for me. And you'll never know what it was like—after the engagement was announced. And I waited and you never came near me. And when we met at that supper, and I tried to be friends, you wouldn't have anything to do with me. Oh, Denys, dear Denys, you've got a lot to answer for! And if

you want me to forgive you, you must go to sleep at once!"

He lay back with one hand holding the two plaits of hair till they formed an oval frame for the dewy eyes and smiling face.

"I can't go to sleep unless you kiss me good-night."

THE END